

Posthumous Academic Awards Policy

Policy rationale

This policy is designed to establish two posthumous academic awards, a degree and a certificate, for students enrolled at Cornell University who died before completing their degree requirements. The policy also establishes university-wide eligibility criteria and processes for conferring such awards.

Conferring of a posthumous degree is a common practice among colleges and universities, including the other Ivy League institutions, as a means to recognize and commemorate the deceased student's engagement in our campus community and to provide grieving family and friends some small solace through this recognition. Degrees that may be awarded posthumously are Bachelor's, Master's, Professional, and Doctoral Degrees.

Awarding of a posthumous certificate accomplishes the same goals by recognizing the student's enrollment at Cornell University.

Eligibility criteria for awarding a posthumous degree

A student is eligible to receive a posthumous degree if the student:

- was enrolled at Cornell at the time of their death, or is on a leave of absence at the time of their death (e.g., personal, health, or military) for a period of less than five years¹;
- was not, at the time of death, on a Suspension from the University (e.g., based upon a finding of misconduct under the Cornell Student Code of Conduct, Cornell Policy 6.4, or the Cornell Code of Academic Integrity)²;
- was in good academic standing at the time of their death; and
- completed 75% of their degree requirements. In the case of PhD students, the committee chair will make this milestone determination.

Eligibility criteria for awarding a posthumous certificate of enrollment

A student who is ineligible to receive a posthumous degree because they did not complete 75% of their degree requirements is eligible to receive a posthumous certificate, which indicates the student's period of enrollment at Cornell, if the student:

- was enrolled at Cornell at the time of their death, or is on a leave of absence at the time of their death (e.g., personal, health, or military) for a period of less than five years;
- was not at the time of death on a Suspension from the University (e.g., based upon a finding of misconduct under the Cornell Student Code of Conduct, Cornell Policy 6.4, or the Cornell Code of Academic Integrity); and
- was in good academic standing at the time of death.

¹ This is a 5-year limitation pursuant to Retention of University Records [Policy 4.7](#)

² To uphold academic and institutional integrity as a criteria for conferring awards

Exception to these eligibility criteria for awarding posthumous degrees or certificates

In exceptional circumstances where a student has nearly met the eligibility criteria, with the approval of the dean of the college/school in which the student was last enrolled, a posthumous degree or certificate may be awarded to a student who does not fully meet the established criteria.

Posthumous award requests

Requests for a posthumous award may be made by a member of the university community or a member of the deceased student's family. If the request is from someone other than an immediate family member, the dean of the academic unit in which the student was enrolled must obtain approval from the family before conferring the award. The dean may exercise discretion in determining whether it is inappropriate to contact the deceased student's family in order to pursue the award.

Approval and awarding process

1. Upon the death of a currently enrolled student, the dean instructs the college/school registrar to conduct a review of the student's academic record and progress toward degree, and to confer with the student's academic department to determine if the eligibility criteria were met.
2. After the college/school registrar verifies that all eligibility criteria for a posthumous degree or certificate have been met, the dean shall confirm approval of the family, and upon approval, confirm the award.
3. After the dean's approval, the college/school registrar will notify the Office of the University Registrar, as well as the academic department chair.
4. The dean, or designee, will notify the student's family, or designee that the award will be conferred.
5. When a posthumous degree is awarded, the Office of the University Registrar will post the degree to the student's academic record and order an official diploma. The statement "awarded posthumously" will be printed on the student's academic record, but not on the diploma.
6. The award conferral date shall reflect the date of the semester in which the award was approved.
7. Posthumous degree awards will be included in the commencement program if the immediate family desires and if feasible (e.g., there is sufficient notice).
8. When a posthumous certificate is awarded, the Office of the University Registrar will order the certificate.

9. The framed diploma or certificate is mailed to the family or designee of the student unless arrangements have been made by the college/school or a commencement coordinator (in the case of a degree) for the family or designee to accept the diploma during a private meeting or recognition/commencement ceremony.