

Posthumous Degrees & In Memoriam Recognition

Category: *Academic Affairs*

Policy Number: 2810

Policy Manager: *Office of the Provost*

Current Revision Approval Date: 2/6/2026



PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear, consistent standards for: (1) awarding posthumous earned degrees when a student dies before conferral; (2) awarding posthumous honorary degrees; and (3) providing In Memoriam recognition when degree criteria are not met, while upholding academic integrity and maintaining accurate institutional records and reporting.

TARGET AUDIENCE

This policy applies to academic departments/programs, Deans, the Graduate School, the Office of the Registrar, the Provost, and the President.

AUTHORITY

- A. The University's Board of Visitors, pursuant to Virginia Code § 23.1-1301, may delegate administrative authority to the University President, who may, in turn, delegate authority to other university personnel.
- B. The University's Provost, through presidential delegation, shall oversee the development and implementation of policies related to the University's academic affairs.

DEFINITIONS

In Memoriam Recognition: A formal, non-degree acknowledgement for students who do not meet the thresholds for a posthumous earned degree.

Posthumous Earned Degree: An academic credential awarded after death to a student who has substantially completed degree requirements.

Posthumous Honorary Degree: An honorary distinction (not an earned credential) awarded by the Board of Visitors in recognition of extraordinary achievement, leadership, or service.

Virginia State University – VSU or University

POLICY STATEMENT

1. Posthumous Earned Degrees — General Standard

The University may award a posthumous earned degree to an otherwise eligible student when the student meets (a) baseline eligibility criteria and (b) the substantial completion threshold for the applicable degree level as stated in this policy.

Program-level policies that establish more stringent academic requirements remain in effect.

1.1 Baseline Eligibility (All Degree Levels)

A student is eligible for consideration for a posthumous earned degree only if all of the following conditions are met:

- **Enrollment Status:** The student was enrolled at the time of death, or had been enrolled within the preceding twelve (12) months, or was on an approved leave of absence.
- **Academic and Conduct Standing:** The student was in good academic and conduct standing with no unresolved disciplinary sanctions or administrative/financial bars.
- **Academic Unit Support:** The academic department/program supports the award based on the student's academic record and progress toward completion of degree requirements.
- **External Requirements:** Awarding the degree does not violate applicable accreditation, licensure, residency, or statutory requirements.

2. Substantial Completion — Degree Level Thresholds

2.1 Doctoral Degree Programs (Ed.D., Ph.D.)

A posthumous earned doctoral degree may be awarded only when the student:

- Meets all baseline eligibility criteria in Section 1.1; and
- Has completed at least fifty percent (50%) of total required program credits or program milestones, as documented in the student's academic record; and
- Meets doctoral program requirements sufficient to support a determination of substantial completion under this policy.

If the doctoral criteria are not met, a posthumous earned doctoral degree shall not be awarded.

2.2 Master's Degree Programs

A posthumous earned master's degree may be awarded when the student:

- Meets all baseline eligibility criteria in Section 1.1; and
- Has completed at least seventy-five percent (75%) of required program credits; and
- Where applicable, has an approved thesis or capstone plan.

2.3 Bachelor's Degree Programs

A posthumous earned bachelor's degree may be awarded when the student:

- Meets all baseline eligibility criteria in Section 1.1; and
- Has completed at least ninety (90) semester credit hours; and
- Has completed at least seventy-five percent (75%) of major requirements.

3. In Memoriam Recognition (Non-Degree)

When a student dies while enrolled or recently enrolled but does not meet the criteria for a posthumous earned degree, the University may provide In Memoriam recognition.

In Memoriam recognition:

- Is not an academic degree;
- Is not recorded as a conferred credential on the transcript; and
- Is not counted as a degree in official reporting.

Examples of in memoriam recognition include a certificate or a commencement program notation.

4. Posthumous Honorary Degrees

Posthumous honorary degrees are awarded only by action of the Board of Visitors, following the same standards and review process used for honorary degrees awarded to living recipients.

5. Records and Notation (Policy Requirements)

- For posthumous earned degrees, the student's transcript will include a notation indicating that the degree was awarded posthumously.
- In Memoriam recognitions and posthumous honorary degrees are not recorded as earned degrees on the transcript.

6. Governance

Academic units submit recommendations through the academic governance chain. The Provost reviews recommendations and forwards eligible recommendations to the President. The President transmits approved recommendations to the Board of Visitors. The Board of Visitors confers degrees by formal resolution.

RELATED PROCEDURES

See Attachment A, Posthumous Degrees & In Memoriam Recognition Procedures

RELATED MATERIALS/REFERENCES

N/A

APPROVED BY:



Board of Visitors

2/6/26

Date

REVISION HISTORY

This policy supersedes the following archived policies:

None

ATTACHMENT A
Posthumous Degrees & In Memoriam Recognition
Procedures



1. Purpose

This procedure implements the University's Posthumous Degrees & In Memoriam Recognition Policy by describing required documentation, evaluation steps, routing and approvals, communications, and records practices.

2. Initiating a Case

- A case may be initiated when the University is notified that a currently enrolled or recently enrolled student has died.
- The academic department/program typically initiates the academic review and coordinates with the Dean's office and the Office of the Registrar.

3. Documentation Requirements

3.1 Department/Program Certification (Written)

The department/program prepares a written certification summarizing:

- Enrollment status (enrolled at time of death; enrolled within last 12 months; or on approved leave).
- Academic and conduct standing (including any unresolved sanctions/bars).
- Degree progress (credits completed and/or milestones completed).
- Recommended action (posthumous earned degree or In Memoriam recognition).
- Any applicable accreditation/licensure/residency constraints relevant to awarding.

3.2 Registrar Record Verification

The Office of the Registrar verifies and documents:

- Official credit totals and accepted transfer credit applied to the program of study.
- Degree audit information needed to confirm percentage thresholds (master's/bachelor's).
- Administrative/financial bars that may affect conferral processing.

4. Evaluation Steps (Operational)

4.1 Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programs (Checklist Review)

- Confirm baseline eligibility per the policy.

ATTACHMENT A

Posthumous Degrees & In Memoriam Recognition Procedures



- Confirm degree-level thresholds: bachelor's (≥ 90 credits and $\geq 75\%$ major completion); master's ($\geq 75\%$ credits and approved thesis/capstone plan if applicable).
- Prepare department recommendation memorandum for the Dean's review.

4.2 Doctoral Programs (Feasibility Narrative)

For doctoral programs, the department prepares a brief feasibility narrative documenting:

- Evidence of at least 50% completion of credits and/or program milestones.
- A reasonable expectation the student would have completed remaining requirements within approximately 12 months, based on documented progress and milestones.
- Confirmation that awarding would not conflict with accreditation/licensure/residency/statutory rules.

If doctoral criteria are not satisfied, the department prepares an In Memoriam recommendation instead.

5. Routing and Approvals

- Department/Program → Dean: Submit certification, supporting documentation, and recommended action.
- Dean → Provost: Review for policy consistency and forward recommendation (approve/deny/return for more information).
- Provost → President: Review for academic affairs compliance and forward eligible recommendations.
- President → Board of Visitors: Transmit approved recommendations for action by formal resolution.

6. Communication and Family Engagement

- Communications should be coordinated through appropriate University channels and handled with sensitivity and privacy considerations.
- After Board action, the University notifies appropriate stakeholders and coordinates with the family as needed regarding recognition and any ceremony participation.

ATTACHMENT A
Posthumous Degrees & In Memoriam Recognition
Procedures



7. In Memoriam Recognition Options (Operational)

In Memoriam recognition may include:

- Issuance of an In Memoriam certificate to the family; and/or
- A notation in the commencement program or a brief moment of recognition at a ceremony.

8. Records, Coding, and Reporting (Registrar SOP)

8.1 Transcript Notation

For posthumous earned degrees, the Registrar applies the approved transcript notation indicating the degree was awarded posthumously.

8.2 Coding/Reporting Controls

Operational coding and reporting instructions maintained by the Registrar are applied to ensure:

- In Memoriam recognition is not recorded as an earned credential.
- Posthumous honorary degrees are not recorded as earned degrees.
- Official reporting excludes non-degree recognitions from degree counts.

9. Records Retention

Units retain documentation supporting recommendations and actions in accordance with University records retention requirements.

Last Review: 2/4/2026