

## Policies on Posthumous Degrees

### Question

Does anyone have any policies that govern when a degree may be awarded posthumously?

We do one every few years and hardly anyone remembers what criteria were used each time.

Any advice would be appreciated.

Thanks,  
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### Answers

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TRU on the Web @ [www.tru.ca](http://www.tru.ca)

Posthumous certificates, diplomas or degrees may be awarded at the discretion of the Division/ Faculty/School Dean on the recommendation of the relevant Department and Program faculty. To be eligible, a student for whom such a recommendation is made must normally have succeeded in completing at least the first three-fourths of their program and have begun the final fourth. The notation "posthumous" will be recorded on the student's transcript, but will not appear on the certificate, diploma, or degree document.

<http://www.tru.ca/assets/policy/ed/ed11-0.pdf>

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We at UBC are in the same position as you. We grant a degree posthumously every few years. We handle them on a case-by-case basis.

There are a few rules of thumb:

1. The name of the candidate must be approved by their Faculty and that name is presented to the Senate for approval with the posthumous notation made explicit.
2. Once the recommendation gets to Senate, it is never (in my experience) turned down.

3. Faculties, however, may be harder to convince to make the recommendation to the Senate. Candidates who were very close to degree completion are easier cases, but with strong departmental support, special cases have been made for students with a substantial amount of work left to complete at the time they passed away.

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We do have the odd case where posthumous degrees are awarded if the degree requirements have been met. We had one on October 20th where the sister of the deceased accepted the degree on behalf of her brother. The Convocation program had an asterisk next to the name of the deceased graduate and the orator mentioned that the sister was accepting the degree on behalf of her brother who was tragically killed in an accident. The sister wore the hood on her arm and the President extended special greetings when she crossed the Convocation stage. Worked well, considering.

-- follow-up --

Based on our recent experiences with this, they would virtually have to have completed at least 95% plus of the degree requirements. In another recent case, only one final exam was missing so an Aegrotat grade was granted and the degree was conferred posthumously. Accidents on Hwy 401. Another special certificate is usually also issued on behalf of the graduating class of that discipline.

=====  
Neil Marnoch  
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we don't have a strict criteria at the U of Manitoba. We have a protocol that says if a student passes away with the last 12 credit hours or less in-progress I should propose a degree notwithstanding to Senate. In a few instances, however, faculties have proposed degrees to be awarded notwithstanding completion of requirements for students who are short as many as 24 credit hours. The most recent case was a Canadian soldier who was killed in service. He had completed all his core courses but was short 24 credit hours of electives. The faculty proposed this as an exception due to the circumstances. They would not normally have proposed this for someone who was missing that many. Every case is different and we don't have a formal policy on this.

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[www.mcmaster.ca/univsec/policy/PosthumousDegreeAwarding.pdf](http://www.mcmaster.ca/univsec/policy/PosthumousDegreeAwarding.pdf)

**Protocol for the Presentation of Degrees Awarded Posthumously**

The Senate approved the following process for the presentation of degrees awarded posthumously:

1. Decanal approval of a degree to be awarded posthumously will be communicated to the University Registrar.
2. The University Registrar will contact the family of the deceased student to discuss possible arrangements for the awarding of a degree.
3. The awarding of the posthumous degree will be communicated via a notation on the list of graduands normally distributed to Senate.
4. The deceased student's name will be included in the appropriate Convocation program with an added notation that the degree has been awarded posthumously.
5. The name of the deceased student will not be read during the Convocation ceremony.

6. In a private ceremony to be held immediately after the Convocation ceremony, the Chancellor, the President and the Dean of the Faculty will present the family with the deceased student's diploma

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**Policies**

Policy on Posthumous Degrees

1. A posthumous degree will be granted to a deceased student only under the following minimum conditions. The student must have
  - a. Died within 12 months of the last registration;
  - b. Been in good academic standing of a high enough standard that eventual graduation was expected;
  - c. For a graduate degree, completed all course work and submitted a satisfactory draft of the thesis if required for the program;
  - d. For undergraduates in programs requiring 20.0 or more credits, completed at least 15.0 credits;
  - e. For undergraduates in programs requiring 15.0 credits, completed at least 12.0 credits.
2. The posthumous degree must be recommended by the department and faculty board and be approved by Senate.
3. Students who were in an Honours program at the time of death but are not eligible for a posthumous Honours degree may be recommended for the corresponding General degree, if the criteria for that degree are met.
4. Procedures:
  - a. On receiving notice of the death of a student, the Registrar determines if the student would be eligible for a posthumous degree and communicates this information to the department, the Clerk of Senate and the President.
  - b. The President or delegate will communicate with the next of kin.
  - c. The posthumous degree will be noted as such, in the Senate graduation list and the convocation program, but not on the diploma.
  - d. The diploma will be presented only to the next of kin or their delegate.

Policy on Certificates of Outstanding Academic Achievement – *in memoriam*

1. A "Certificate of Outstanding Academic Achievement – *in memoriam*" will be awarded to a deceased undergraduate student only if the following minimum requirements are met. The student must have
  - a. Died within 12 months of the last registration;
  - b. Been in good academic standing of a high enough standard that eventual graduation was expected;
  - c. Completed at least half the degree credit requirements;
  - d. Distinguished his or herself academically through scholarship, leadership or service.
2. The certificate must be recommended by the department and faculty board and be approved by Senate.
3. Procedures:
  - a. The request to award such a certificate may emanate from others, but the next of kin must approve.
  - b. The President or delegate will communicate with the next of kin
  - c. The certificate will be presented only to the next of kin or their delegate.

**Brock**

Barb Davis [bdavis@brocku.ca](mailto:bdavis@brocku.ca)

The following is Brock University's academic regulation with respect to the awarding of a posthumous degree. It works quite well for us.

A posthumous degree is awarded at the discretion of the Dean of the student's Faculty, on the recommendation of the Chair(s) of the appropriate Department(s) or Program(s). To be eligible, a student for whom such a recommendation is made, must normally have succeeded in completing at least 75 percent of the degree program and have begun the final 25 percent of the program. The notation "posthumous" will be recorded on the student's official academic record, but will not appear on the diploma.

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**NAIT**

Yurchuk, Don" <dony@nait.ca>

We have the same situation and use a general framework instead of attempting to impose a single standard.

In general, if the individual was in the final term of the program and was in good standing academically when they passed away, we will issue a diploma or degree posthumously. We will frame the parchment (with the official NAIT frame) and have it delivered to the family by faculty who knew the student. Often, these same faculty (and a large number of students) will attend the funeral and may become part of the celebration of life. Of course, it all depends on the survivors. We are completely sensitive to their needs. Our President gleans personal information and writes a very personal note to the family. We also reverse all fees for that semester and have a procedure for cleaning out lockers and workspace. We change the address of the deceased to NAIT to ensure no further communication unless we specifically direct it. There is more but you get the idea.

If they are one term earlier, we have to consider carefully whether to issue the parchment. These cases go either way depending on the circumstances.

You did not ask but I will give you one further bit of information. Sometimes we have a student with a terminal illness. The same rules as are stated above apply except that we will confer the parchment to the individual at home, in the hospital or the hospice, in accordance with their and the family's wishes. A staff member known to the student will make the presentation and that can include full regalia. We have had families completely decorate a hospital room and both family and extended family attend the ceremony. This has become a huge celebration of the life and accomplishments of the individual who is dying. Some families have contacted us personally after the fact to tell us how important this was to the newly departed. This may sound somewhat macabre but it is not, when handled carefully.

All of these incidents are extremely difficult for staff and students who must go on after the loss. We do much counseling after the fact.

follow-up

This is the most difficult part of my job and we always work with utmost dignity and respect for the survivors. This includes the President, his direct staff, my staff and everyone else who is involved. I have been told, more than once by staff who were directly involved, that they could not see why we did all this until they were involved. Afterwards, they were grateful for the opportunity and understood perfectly. As information, we have 3 - 6 student deaths annually and a just a few students who are dying.

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The University of Lethbridge has a policy on awarding posthumous degrees.

From the Calendar...

**POSTHUMOUS DEGREES**

With the approval of a Faculty/School Council, a degree, diploma, or certificate may be awarded posthumously to a deceased student who had completed his/her program or was completing the last semester of his/her program. Posthumous awards will be noted on the transcript.

Also, we print "Awarded Posthumously" under the credential category on the parchment. For example,

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE  
*Awarded Posthumously*

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**Kwantlen University College**  
Jody Gordon

This has only happened once since I have been Registrar. The student died in her last semester of her diploma so I had the instructors submit aegrotat grades for her final courses and then we awarded her credential posthumously to her family.

No rules, no policies, just did what we could.

=====  
**Emily Carr**

Alan McMillan <amcmillan@eciad.ca>

we have a posthumous diploma/degree policy which we have used on seven occasions in the last 13 years. Our policy is as follows:

1. A posthumous diploma or degree candidate will be recommended to the Education Council by the Dean and the Registrar.
2. The candidate should normally have begun the final year of the program at the time of death.
3. The notation "posthumous" should appear in the graduation program but not the transcript or the diploma certificate.
4. The Dean or the Registrar will contact the family and agree on how and when the certificate is to be presented. If it is to be presented at the graduation ceremony a family member or designate can receive it.
5. If the certificate is to be presented at the ceremony the Registrar will inform that person of the procedures for receiving the certificate at the ceremony.

NOTE: We have been quite liberal on point #2. Several candidates were in 2nd or 3rd year.

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we do these on a one-off basis as the circumstances can be so different in each case.

Generally, the student must have completed most of their final year and have been registered in courses which would have allowed them to graduate. Faculty members may be asked to assess how well the student was doing in the course (if the student was passing) and then we'll take it from there. We need approval from the VP Academic and it would be presented to Senate with the convocation roll.

I have had only one instance since I've been here at Trent (7 years) - thank goodness!

**McGill**

"Nicholas B. de Takacsy, Prof." <nicholas.de\_takacsy@mcgill.ca>

At McGill, we don't have a University policy on awarding posthumous degrees. The student's Faculty will decide if a degree should be awarded posthumously in the event that a student passes away. In most cases, if the deceased student has completed all the program requirements then the degree is granted posthumously. However, there have been a few posthumous degrees awarded where the student had not completed all the program requirements.

The notation "Degree granted posthumously" appears on the student's transcript and in the Convocation program but not on the parchment.

A family member may attend the Convocation ceremony and receive the degree on behalf of the deceased student.

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Yves Jodoin
Registrar and Secretary General
Bishop's University

On the University Secretaries list-serve, this topic was discussed last August, below are some university web sites and quotes you could check for policies. Also attached are a couple of documents submitted by colleagues in other universities.

I'm sure you will find it helpful,

Regards,

U of Toronto : http://www.utoronto.ca/govcncl/pap/policies/postawar.pdf

Copied from the URL – Bill

Posthumous degrees should be awarded only under the following circumstances:

- 1. Where the student has successfully completed all the requirements of his or her program or where all of the academic requirements have been completed and only a limited amount of practical work remains to be completed.
2. Where the award of a posthumous degree is approved by the Divisional Council concerned, and by the Academic Affairs Committee or the delegates of the Committee charged with approving examination results.
3. Assent of the family should be sought after the Academic Affairs Committee has approved the award of the degree.

Thompson Rivers University : http://www.tru.ca/assets/policy/ed/ed11-0.pdf

Guelph : http://www.uoguelph.ca/graduatestudies/forms/a&p.pdf

Copied from the URL – Bill

12. POSTHUMOUS DEGREES

A degree may be awarded posthumously to a student whose studies were interrupted by death if the following criteria are met:

for Doctoral degrees: Normally, the Qualifying Examination must have been successfully completed; the average grade of any prescribed courses taken must meet the minimum level (B-) for graduation.

for Master's degrees: Normally, all course requirements for the program must have been completed;  
the average grade of prescribed courses must meet the minimum level (B-) for graduation.

Now, direct quotes :

**McGill** : ... It appears, from practice, that each faculty makes the decision and then seeks ARR and Senate's approval. In some cases the students have completed their degree in other cases they have not....

**University of Windsor** : ... In both cases, each of the students had almost completed their degree, and a family member was allowed to go on stage to receive it. We purchased a hood, and it was given to the family member (hood draped on their arm, not worn by the family member) Again, on a case by case look at each individual with faculty consultation. The student's name is inserted in the program with ( posthumously) following the name. There are no written policies on this (as far as I know).

If the student was **not close** to completing the degree, the Registrar had a degree substitute certificate (looks just like the degree, except for the wording) and this is given to the family member. Family members did not attend the ceremony.

**Lakehead** : ... In the absence of formal policy, the Registrar consults with the Faculty concerned and determines, case by case, if a degree can be awarded without comprising its academic integrity. In most cases, that would mean that the requirements for the degree would have been met. But, for example, one of our Honours Bachelor of Commerce students died accidentally last winter. While he had not met the requirements for the HBComm, he *had* completed all requirements for the three-year Bachelor of Business Administration and that degree was awarded posthumously at our May Convocation last spring. The degree was noted as Posthumous in the Convocation program and was accepted by his Mom and Dad-- and they walked across the stage to do so (their choice).

**Concordia University** : ... if the degree requirements are satisfied, the degree is issued and sent to the family with the appropriate covering letter. On two occasions, at the family's request, a parent attended the Convocation ceremony and crossed the stage to receive the degree in the place of the deceased child.

**University of Manitoba** : ... The awarding of posthumous degrees, diplomas and certificates is made only on the recommendation of a Faculty or School Council and when the requirements for the degree, diploma or certificate are substantially satisfied.

**Ryerson** has awarded a few posthumous degrees to students who were near completion, and with the approval of the Senate Awards and Ceremonials Committee. Honorary Doctorates would only be awarded posthumously if the award was granted before the person died.

**UNB** has granted posthumous degrees. These are determined on a case by case basis through consultation between the home faculty or department and the registrar rather than fixed policy. Posthumous degrees are usually awarded in circumstances where the individual was close to completing the degree requirements.

Our Honorary Degrees Policy and procedure states: "... that the University normally not award honorary degrees in absentia or posthumously, although the Committee may recommend or the University may grant such an award in exceptional circumstances." The Board of Governors approves all honorary degrees.

**University of Saskatchewan** : We have occasionally granted a posthumous degree to a student who dies in his/her last year of course work, and usually by awarding Aegrotat Standing in any courses where the final

exam was not written or work was outstanding. The awarding would have to be on the recommendation of the Faculty Council of the College in which the student was registered (our Faculty Council has delegated all recommendations for degrees to the College Faculties). We give the student's family the option of coming forward to receive the parchment on behalf of the deceased student.

Our honorary degrees policy indicates that we will not normally award an honorary degree posthumously; an exception is made if arrangements have already been made for the conferring of the degree and the candidate dies before the ceremony.

**McMaster University :**

A couple of years ago our Senate approved a protocol for awarding posthumous degrees:

*"that the Senate approve the following process for the presentation of degrees awarded posthumously:*

- 1. Decanal approval of a degree to be awarded posthumously will be communicated to the University Registrar.*
- 2. The University Registrar will contact the family of the deceased student to discuss possible arrangements for the awarding of a degree.*
- 3. The awarding of the posthumous degree will be communicated via a notation on the list of graduands normally distributed to Senate.*
- 4. The deceased student's name will be included in the appropriate Convocation program with an added notation that the degree has been awarded posthumously.*
- 5. The name of the deceased student will not be read during the Convocation ceremony.*
- 6. In a private ceremony to be held immediately after the Convocation ceremony, the Chancellor, the President and the Dean of the Faculty will present the family with the deceased student's diploma."*

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We do award diplomas/degrees posthumously but do not necessarily have a formal policy governing the conferral. Each Faculty is responsible for approving their list of graduands to be admitted to the degrees granted by their College. These Faculties would also make the final decision as to whether the posthumous diploma or degree candidate had sufficiently met requirements to be awarded the diploma/degree. We have had a case where a Faculty determined that a third year student was not far enough along in the program to consider awarding the degree posthumously. Posthumous awards are only made if the student is very close to completing the requirements for the degree/diploma.

If it is determined that a degree/diploma is to be awarded posthumously, the notation of "posthumous" will appear in the Convocation program but not on the parchment. The Dean or the Registrar/Convocation Office will contact the family to determine whether they would like to attend the Convocation ceremony. If they do wish to attend the ceremony, they also have the option to process onto the stage to be presented the parchment in place of the student. The Convocation Office will work with the family to assure they have reserved seating and to slip them into the appropriate spot within the line-up of graduands that are waiting to cross the stage.

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Ryerson University is currently developing their policy on posthumous degrees and nothing has been passed by Senate yet. However, in the past we would look at each situation on a case by case basis and have never not awarded posthumously. We have also found that families are thrilled to attend convocation and receive the award document (parchment) on their deceased family member's behalf. No family has ever asked for a private ceremony but that would certainly be accommodated. We also do not make any special

note in the convocation program listing of students nor on the award document. We have also presented an award document several weeks prior to convocation when a student was in hospital and not expected to survive.

The policy is still in the developmental stage so I don't have much more to share as no final recommendations have been made. The only thing I will say is that we are making is as comprehensive as possible to include certificates, undergraduate and graduate degrees, graduate theses, dissertations, etc.

I expect our posthumous policy to be passed by our Senate early in the new year.

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