

University Policy: Posthumous Degree

Policy Category: Student Policies

Subject: Awarding of Posthumous Recognition to Undergraduate, Graduate, and Law Students.

Responsible Executive: Provost

Office(s) Responsible for Review of this Policy: Offices of the Provost, University Registrar, and Washington College of Law Registrar, Deans of Undergraduate Education, Graduate Studies, and Washington College of Law

Related University Policies: Undergraduate Academic Regulations; Graduate Academic Regulations; Academic Calendar

I. SCOPE

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

II. POLICY STATEMENT

This Policy is designed to establish standard criteria and procedures under which posthumous degrees or Certificates of Memoriam may be awarded to undergraduate, graduate, and law students, enrolled in degree programs, who die before the awarding of their degree.

III. DEFINITIONS

Certificate in Memoriam: Signifies a recognition of a deceased student enrolled in a degree-granting program who made some academic progress toward a degree.

Family Member: Refers to a parent or legal guardian, spouse, partner, or child of the deceased student.

Posthumous Degree: Means a degree conferred by the University to a deceased student who died before the awarding of their degree.

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. A posthumous degree recognition is reserved for degree candidates who, in addition to enrollment in a degree program at the university, are in good academic standing at the time of their deaths, and meet the criteria below. Therefore, a

posthumous degree may only be awarded in cases where specific criteria are met via evaluation of the student's academic record, pursuant to the procedures described below. A Certificate in Memoriam may be awarded to a student who meets only the first criterion (Section V.1) below.

V. Criteria for Eligibility

1. At the time of the student's death, they were enrolled in a degree program and in good academic standing.
2. Requirements for the award of the posthumous degree are:
 - a. For bachelor's, master's, and law degree candidates, seventy-five percent of the required credits for the degree have been successfully completed the time of the student's death.
 - b. 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 shall consult with the Chair and members of the dissertation committee and make a determination that the dissertation was significantly completed, i.e., that a substantial draft exists and satisfactory progress had been made.
3. Students not meeting the requirements in Section V.2 will be automatically awarded a Certificate in Memoriam. The procedures outlined below in Section VI do not apply to the Certificate of Memoriam.

VI. PROCEDURES

1. A deceased student who is enrolled in a degree program at the time of their death may be nominated for a posthumous degree by an AU faculty or staff member or a Family Member. Nominations should be made within two calendar years of the student's death.
 - a. If the nomination is submitted by a faculty or staff member, the Dean of the academic unit must obtain approval from a student's Family Member prior to a complete review and consideration of the nomination.
2. 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 Dean of the Washington College of Law will submit their request directly to the Provost.
 - a. The request must include the name and ID number of the student, the degree to be awarded, and the recommended semester for degree conferral.
 - b. The death of the student, their enrollment status, academic standing, and the progress on degree requirements must be verified by the academic unit before submission to the Provost.
3. If supported by the Provost, the Provost or designee will notify the Office of the University Registrar or Washington College of Law Office of the Registrar in writing via a memo to initiate the process for degree conferral.

4. The appropriate registrar's office will notify Special Events personnel for commencement arrangements. The Dean of the academic unit will inform the student's Family Member and the AU staff or faculty member who initiated the request of the university's decision to recognize the student with a posthumous degree.
 - a. If the student's Family Member would like there to be recognition of the posthumous degree at a commencement ceremony, this arrangement should be conveyed at least six weeks in advance of the ceremony date to Special Events personnel.
 - b. A posthumous degree may also be presented by an appropriate University official to the student's Family Member(s) in a private gathering, separate from the commencement ceremony.
 - c. If the student's Family Member(s) requests that there not be public recognition of the posthumous degree, the University will honor the wishes of the Family Member(s).

The appropriate registrar's office will post the notice of the award of the posthumous degree to the student's transcript. There will not be a notation on either the diploma or transcript to indicate the degree was awarded posthumously.

VII.EFFECTIVE DATE AND REVISIONS:

This Policy is effective as of January 30, 2014. This Policy was revised as of April 25, 2025.