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July 29, 2025

Academic Senate Division Chairs

Re: Systemwide Principles for Awarding Degrees Posthumously

Dear Division Chairs,

On behalf of the Academic Council, I am forwarding for your information and dissemination the attached UC Systemwide Academic Senate Principles for Awarding Degrees Posthumously, developed by the Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA) and the University Committee on Educational Policy (UCEP).

These principles were developed in response to questions and concerns raised during the 2024 [systemwide review](#) of a proposed Senate Regulation 627, which considered codification of a policy for awarding University degrees posthumously. After reviewing feedback from the divisions and further discussion with Council members, CCGA and UCEP determined that issuing systemwide principles would be a better approach than introducing a formal regulation. Such principles provide a common framework for honoring students who pass away while enrolled at UC and still retain campus flexibility to address unforeseen circumstances.

The principles are intended to balance the need for compassion with respect for academic integrity. In particular, they emphasize flexibility over rigid criteria, recognizing that the circumstances leading to a student's death may also affect their academic standing or ability to complete required coursework. They also include recommendations for local processes and a set of frequently asked questions that clarify the committees' rationale.

By articulating these principles, the Academic Senate seeks to provide campuses with a compassionate, consistent, and equitable foundation for making decisions about the posthumous awarding of degrees. We hope this resource proves helpful as you review or refine your local policies and practices.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steven W. Cheung'.

Steven W. Cheung
Chair, Academic Council

cc: Academic Council
Provost and Executive Vice President Newman
Senate Division Executive Directors
Senate Executive Director Lin



**University of California Systemwide Academic Senate
Principles for Awarding Degrees Posthumously**

Purpose

By awarding degrees posthumously, the University of California seeks to recognize the academic achievements of students who die while engaged in their studies and to extend sympathy and compassion towards their families. Like honorary degrees, these are not aimed at certifying a particular level of advancement or professional readiness.

Procedures

The process for identifying and reviewing candidates for the posthumous conferring of degrees will vary from campus to campus, but should consider the following components and principles:

Considerations for Eligibility:

Given the above purpose, it is recommended that the approach to awarding degrees posthumously be as generous as possible. The following general points should be considered, but flexibility may be required depending on the unique circumstances of each potential awardee:

- (1) Posthumous conferral of a degree is primarily intended for students who have started their studies and are currently enrolled or on leave at the time of death.
- (2) Such degrees should be routinely granted to students who have maintained good academic and administrative standing (excluding financial status).
- (3) Students who do not fall in the categories above should also be considered, in particular in situations where the circumstances that led to the student's death (e.g. serious illness), also contributed to a deterioration in performance and/or an inability to continue with the degree program.
- (4) Awarding a degree to a student whose actions/behavior might have led to dismissal from the university may be considered under exceptional circumstances but should involve additional review.

Request Process:

- (1) Each campus should have a process for requesting consideration for a degree to be awarded posthumously that is clearly defined and made easily accessible to all impacted families.
 - (2) To accommodate students' varying circumstances, it is recommended that the list of people who can initiate a request be as broad as possible, including but not limited to family members and/or survivors, faculty members, administrators, or fellow students.
 - (3) Clear guidelines for communication should be established, especially for circumstances in which the request is not made by a family member or there is a difference of opinion.
- Whenever possible, families should be consulted before proceeding with a potential award.

Approval Process:

Each campus should establish a systematic process for reviewing requests to award degrees posthumously, including rules governing exceptional cases.

The official recommendation for the conferral of the degree should be made by the appropriate Senate committee (Regents Policy Bylaw 40).

Recommendations for the Recognition/Conferral of the Degree:

- (1) The student's diploma should be released or mailed to the person(s) who made the degree request.
- (2) The diploma provided should be standard issue, avoiding any special labeling indicating it is being awarded posthumously, to minimize distress to families and loved ones.
- (3) Any fees associated with the administration of the degree should be waived.
- (4) A request from family and/or loved ones for the student's name to be included in graduation programs should be considered.

Principles for Awarding Degrees Posthumously Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why do the guidelines not suggest specific progress thresholds for degree eligibility, e.g. minimum time enrolled, completed coursework, advancement to candidacy, or similar? Why is there no suggested time-limit for submitting a request?

A. As the purpose of awarding a degree posthumously is to provide comfort to the family and loved ones of the student, rather than to certify a particular level of advancement or professional readiness, the committees drafting the guidelines felt that it was best to allow broad eligibility. In the case of graduate students, campuses may feel it is more appropriate to award a Master's degree posthumously than a doctoral degree if a student has not yet advanced to candidacy.

Q. Why do the guidelines not require or include formal definitions of "good academic and administrative standing"?

A. Because posthumous conferral of the degree is intended for the family and loved ones of the student and not to be used as a representation to another entity of UC's endorsement of the quality or depth of the student's work, the principles emphasize compassion over rigid criteria such as GPA or credit completion thresholds. Moreover, it may frequently be the case that the same circumstances that led to the death of the student may also have contributed to poor performance and/or behavior. Saying that a student cannot be awarded a degree posthumously because, e.g., their illness led to poor grades and they did not move quickly enough to drop classes or take a leave of absence, runs contrary to the compassionate purpose of a degree awarded posthumously.

Q. What is the reason for not labelling the diploma as posthumous?

A. The audience for the diploma consists of the family and loved ones of the deceased student. Including the label may both serve to exacerbate their distress and signal to them that the degree is of lesser value. Since the diploma will not be used for any formal purpose, it was strongly felt that omitting such a label would not create any substantive problems for UC, and that for equity reasons the structure of the diploma should not differ across campuses.

Q. Does this document supersede divisional policies for awarding degrees posthumously?

A. No. The relevant systemwide committees initially proposed a formal policy and corresponding regulations. The goal was to ensure consistency and equity across campuses. Following feedback from the formal review and discussions at the subsequent Academic Council meetings, the previous policy document has been revised as set of principles and guidelines, attempting to create a balance between local autonomy and an overarching common framework.