

# Proposed Models of Honorary Degree Governance at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Ninth Senate Review Commission

## Introduction

This report was prepared by the Ninth Senate Review Commission (SR9) pursuant to the charge issued by the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) on October 7, 2025 under Article VI, Section 10 of the Senate Constitution, directing SR9 to conduct a comprehensive review of the honorary degree award criteria and process and to make recommendations for improvement.

In fulfilling that charge, SR9 undertook a structural and forward-looking examination of the honorary degree process in light of statutory obligations, shared governance principles, and the operational realities of the Senate as a large deliberative body. While institutional history informed SR9's analysis, this report does not revisit prior nominations or individual cases. It focuses on process design.

The document presents shared reforms applicable under any governance structure and evaluates two alternative models for the location of final authority to recommend candidates. It is intended to provide a clear comparative framework to inform Senate consideration and action.

## I. Purpose

Honorary degree awards are conferred by the University and represent one of its highest institutional distinctions. As a public, land-grant, R-1 university, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign exercises the privilege and responsibility of granting honorary degree awards in ways that advance its academic mission and reflect the values of the University community and the broader public it serves. The awarding of an honorary degree forges an enduring relationship between the University and the recipient and publicly signals the standards to which the institution aspires.

Article II, Section 1(d) of the University *Statutes* provides that "Each senate shall recommend candidates for honorary degrees and shall determine for its university the manner in which the faculty shall recommend to the chancellor/vice president candidates for earned degrees, diplomas, and certificates to be conferred by the president under the authority of the Board of Trustees."

This provision assigns the Senate the exclusive responsibility to recommend candidates for honorary degrees and requires that the Senate maintain a mechanism for carrying out that responsibility. Final conferral rests with the Board of Trustees.

Article II, Section 1(g) further provides that the Senate's *Bylaws* may establish committees or other bodies to exercise those statutory duties, thereby authorizing delegation consistent with the Senate's constitutional authority.

The statutory provision addresses both honorary and earned degrees within a single sentence despite the distinct purposes and processes associated with each, a structure that warrants clarification.

Because honorary degree awards are University honors rather than Senate honors alone, and because the Senate's role is defined by the *Statutes*, the governance structure adopted should reflect both the Senate's statutory responsibility and the broader institutional character of the award.

The University of Illinois has a longstanding tradition of shared governance in which faculty, students, staff, administrators, alumni, and trustees participate in institutional decision-making through established structures and articulated standards. In this context, "shared" does not signify a single procedural mechanism or the existence of a veto, but rather a commitment to meaningful participation and informed academic judgment across the University community. Shared governance may be exercised through direct deliberation, through representative or delegated bodies operating under Senate authority, and through structured oversight and periodic review. The structure adopted for recommending honorary degrees should reflect that broader understanding of shared governance while aligning deliberative responsibility with institutional capacity.

Because honorary degree awards carry symbolic and reputational weight, the rigor and fairness of the evaluation process directly affect the credibility of the award, the Senate, and the University as a whole. Although they are institutional honors, they are conferred as academic distinctions, and faculty judgment should therefore play a primary role in their evaluation.

For any nominee, the sponsoring unit has determined that the individual is deserving of one of the University's highest honors. The process, therefore, should reflect the seriousness of that judgment and treat nominees with institutional respect, whether or not an honorary degree award is ultimately conferred. While confidentiality in the consideration of awards is often desirable, as it is with many forms of academic recognition, respect for nominees need not be synonymous with confidentiality. Institutional respect may be maintained through clarity of standards, disciplined deliberation, and adherence to articulated procedures.

The principles outlined above apply regardless of the governance structure adopted. The remaining question is structural: where should final authority to recommend candidates reside within the University's governance framework?

This report evaluates two alternative models for the honorary degree process at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Both preserve meaningful faculty voice while differing in the location of final authority to recommend candidates. Under each model, substantive evaluation of nominees is conducted by a Joint Advisory Commission on Honorary Degrees (JACHD), a body designed to provide broader representation and sustained deliberation in the application

of published criteria. In either case, responsibility for adopting and revising those criteria remains with the Senate.

The models differ primarily in where final authority to recommend candidates sits:

- **Model A:** Final recommendation by JACHD, with Senate discussion but no Senate vote on individual nominees.
- **Model B:** Final recommendation by the Senate, through an up-or-down vote on individual nominees, with structured procedural safeguards.

This document does not advocate for either model. It presents both in full institutional detail for evaluation.

## II. Objectives and Structural Constraints

The review of the honorary degree award process is guided by a set of institutional objectives and structural constraints.

### A. Objectives

The governance structure for recommending honorary degree nominees should:

1. Preserve meaningful faculty voice in the evaluation and recommendation of honorary degrees.
2. Ensure disciplined application of clearly articulated, written criteria at all stages of deliberation.
3. Ensure that nominees are treated with institutional respect, including confirmation of consent before advancement to public deliberation, recognizing that a nomination represents the sponsoring unit's judgment that the individual merits one of the University's highest honors.
4. Clarify allocation of responsibility between substantive evaluation, advocacy, and final recommendation.
5. Maintain institutional credibility by aligning process design with statutory language and established governance norms.
6. Provide a structure capable of sustained, careful consideration of complex factual questions.
7. Support timely coordination with administrative and Board of Trustees processes to ensure that commencement and related institutional events can proceed effectively.

### B. Structural Constraints

Any governance model must operate within the structural realities of the Senate and the University:

1. The Senate is a large deliberative body operating under the Illinois Open Meetings Act (OMA).
2. The Senate meets on a fixed schedule and addresses multiple categories of statutory and governance business at each meeting.
3. Senate deliberation occurs in public session under announced agendas, with limited opportunity for iterative reconsideration outside noticed meetings.
4. The University *Statutes* assign the Senate the exclusive authority to recommend candidates for honorary degrees; the Senate must provide a mechanism for carrying out that responsibility.
5. Upon the recommendation of the Senate, the Board of Trustees has final authority to confer honorary degree awards.
6. Individual senators retain the right to speak and vote according to conscience under Senate rules and applicable law.

These objectives and constraints frame the alternative models presented in this report.

### C. Institutional History of the Honorary Degree Process

The present configuration of the honorary degree awards process reflects historical evolution under the OMA. Prior to 2013, Senate deliberation and vote on honorary degree award nominations occurred in executive session. Following clarification that final Senate action must occur in public session under OMA, the process was modified to ensure compliance with statutory requirements.

In many academic and professional contexts, award deliberations occur in confidential settings designed to encourage candid evaluation and protect nominees from premature public scrutiny. The University's historical honorary degree award process developed within that broader academic tradition. When final Senate action was required to occur in public session under OMA, the existing process was adjusted to ensure compliance, but many of its confidentiality-oriented features remained. The current structure, therefore, reflects incremental adaptation to contemporary legal constraints without a comprehensive reconsideration of how those traditions interact with statutory requirements.

Subsequent governance documents, including the current Honorary Degree Award Guidelines (HD.23.04), retain procedural elements originally designed for confidential deliberation, including provisions that nominees not be informed of their nomination and that external consultations remain confidential. At the same time, final Senate action must occur in public session under OMA.

In 2015, the Seventh Senate Review Commission (SR7) recommended that "a different approach, consistent with the Open Meetings Act, be considered for determining honorary degree recipients," noting the potential for public embarrassment under the existing structure. Although SR7 identified the issue, no comprehensive redesign followed. The Eighth Senate

Review Commission (2019) conducted a broad review of Senate governance but did not substantively revisit the honorary degree process.

SR9, therefore, undertakes the first comprehensive structural review of the honorary degree award process since clarification of OMA requirements. This review does not revisit prior nominations or individual cases but considers whether the existing framework remains optimally aligned with institutional objectives, shared governance principles, and statutory obligations.

### III. Shared Reforms (Applicable Under Either Model)

The following reforms are model-independent and should apply regardless of where the final authority to recommend candidates resides.

#### 1. Criteria Clarification

Adopt and publish revised criteria including:

- Clear achievement standards.
- Consider whether to include reference to professional integrity and conduct among the criteria. Any such criterion should clearly delineate the nature of the standard that will be applied and explicitly state any grounds for disqualification. Lawful political positions, advocacy, or partisan affiliation should not constitute grounds for disqualification.
- Explicit reaffirmation that while philanthropy may play a part in recommending a candidate for an honorary degree award, philanthropy to the University, on its own, is not a sufficient criterion.
- Criteria should be centered at all stages of deliberation and decision-making.

#### 2. Nominee Consent and Withdrawal

- Nominee notified prior to formal advancement.
- Nominee agrees to be considered.
- Nominee informed that public discussion and, where applicable, a Senate vote may occur.
- Nominee may withdraw at any time prior to final action.

#### 3. Faculty Endorsement

- Nominations shall include documentation of faculty-level endorsement within the sponsoring unit (e.g., executive committee approval or equivalent governance review).
- Appropriate structures may include a college executive committee or similar body.

#### 4. Calendar Discipline

- Nominations should reach final Senate consideration (where applicable) or administrative forwarding no later than mid-fall in order to allow sufficient time for Board approval and commencement logistics.
- The structure of consideration should provide adequate opportunity for review and reflection prior to final action.
- Late-cycle nominations should be deferred to the next cycle.
- Consideration should be given to whether the honoree's physical presence at commencement is necessary for the award, or whether virtual appearances or appearance at a different event or time of year would also meet institutional goals.

#### 5. Monitoring and Review

- Annual light monitoring, including re-affirmation of criteria and recommendation/selection of committee members.
- Holistic structural review after 3–5 years.

#### 6. Statutory Amendment

- The current statutory language addressing honorary and earned degrees in a single sentence would benefit from clarification and separation of these distinct functions.

### IV. Joint Advisory Commission on Honorary Degrees (JACHD)

#### A. Purpose and Status

The Joint Advisory Commission on Honorary Degrees (JACHD) shall serve as the primary deliberative body responsible for evaluating honorary degree award nominations against the University's published criteria, including the professional integrity and conduct standard.

JACHD replaces the existing Senate Committee on Honorary Degrees (HD) as the body responsible for substantive vetting of nominees. The creation of JACHD is **not** intended as a criticism of the HD or its members. Rather, it reflects an effort to expand representation, strengthen institutional legitimacy, and provide a forum for more comprehensive deliberation than may be feasible within a standing committee of the Senate.

To ensure continuity and preserve institutional memory, it is expected that initial recommendations for JACHD membership will include some or all current members of HD.

If JACHD is constituted as a separate body, responsibility for periodic review and revision of honorary degree criteria shall remain with an appropriate Senate body. This responsibility may remain with a reconstituted HD focused solely on criteria and structural review, or it may be assigned to another standing committee such as the Senate Committee on General University Policy. Dissolution of HD is therefore a structural possibility, depending on how ongoing oversight responsibilities are allocated.

JACHD is a joint advisory body and is not a standing committee of the Senate. It operates pursuant to authority delegated through Senate *Bylaws* consistent with Article II, Section 1(g) of the University *Statutes*.

The exact structure, composition, and duties of JACHD shall be described in the Senate *Bylaws*, in a manner comparable to other joint advisory bodies such as the Joint Advisory Committee on Investment, Licensing, and Naming Rights (JACILNR) and the Athletic Board.

The precise internal procedures of JACHD—including sequencing of review, documentation standards, and methods for gathering input—shall be defined through the Senate *Bylaws* and the Commission’s own operating procedures. While those details are not prescribed in this report, Appendix B provides supplemental considerations developed during SR9’s deliberations that may inform the Commission’s implementation of a robust and criteria-centered evaluation process under either governance model.

## B. Core Responsibilities

JACHD shall:

1. Evaluate nominations against all published criteria;
2. Apply the professional integrity and conduct standard;
3. Review and document known controversies relevant to the criteria;
4. Ensure that nominations are supported by complete and documented materials;
5. Confirm nominee consent prior to advancement;
6. Vote to recommend or reject advancement of nominations.

JACHD’s recommendation shall reflect both procedural completeness and substantive judgment. A recommendation to advance signifies that the Commission has determined that the nominee satisfies the written criteria and should be recognized through the honorary degree award process.

Advancement shall not be automatic upon submission of a complete dossier. The burden rests with the sponsoring unit to demonstrate that the nominee meets the published criteria.

JACHD is not intended to function as a purely procedural screening body.

## C. Roles of Sponsoring Unit and JACHD

Honorary degree award nominations originate within sponsoring academic units. The burden of initiating and advocating for a nomination rests with the sponsoring unit.

Advancement of a nomination requires affirmative support at two levels:

1. **Sponsoring Unit Endorsement.**

The sponsoring unit, through appropriate faculty governance processes (e.g., executive

committee approval or equivalent review), shall endorse the nomination and assume responsibility for presenting and defending its substantive merits.

**2. JACHD Substantive Recommendation.**

JACHD shall evaluate the nomination against published criteria and determine whether the nominee merits advancement. A recommendation to advance constitutes an affirmative substantive judgment that the nominee satisfies the standards for an honorary degree award.

The roles of the sponsor and JACHD are complementary but distinct. The sponsoring unit advocates for the nominee and responds to substantive questions raised during JACHD deliberations and, where applicable, during Senate discussion or final action. JACHD functions as an evaluative body and does not serve as an advocate.

Nothing in this section limits the right of individual senators or JACHD members to express views consistent with Senate rules and applicable law.

## D. Composition Principles

The effectiveness and legitimacy of JACHD depend on balanced and credible representation.

SR9 discussed the following structural principles:

1. Faculty members shall form a substantial portion of the commission, reflecting the academic character of honorary degree awards.
2. Student members may serve to reflect the educational and symbolic importance of honorary degree awards within the University community.
3. Academic professionals may serve to ensure institutional perspective beyond faculty and students.
4. Administrative members may serve either as voting members or as non-voting *ex officio* participants to ensure coordination and institutional continuity. The structure of voting and non-voting roles shall be defined in the *Bylaws*.

## E. Representation Models

SR9 considered multiple representational structures and did not reach a final determination. The following models were discussed:

1. **College-Based Representation** — Members selected to ensure representation across colleges or major academic units.
2. **Discipline-Based Representation** — Members selected by broad disciplinary domains (e.g., humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, engineering, professional schools), similar to the structure used in certain campus-wide academic award bodies such as the Graduate College Fellowship Board.

3. **Hybrid Model** — A combination of disciplinary representation with limited rotating or *ex officio* college-based seats.

SR9 noted particular merit in discipline-based representation as a means of reinforcing academic standards and reducing perceptions of unit-driven advocacy.

## F. Leadership and Appointment

The chair of JACHD shall be elected by its voting members. The chair shall serve as the primary representative of JACHD in SEC and Senate proceedings.

JACHD shall also include administrative representation designated by the Chancellor (for example, a vice-provost or vice-chancellor) to ensure institutional coordination. Administrative members may serve as voting or non-voting members as defined in the bylaws.

The Senate shall recommend a slate of candidates for membership exceeding the number of available seats. The Chancellor shall appoint members from that slate and may appoint additional members as necessary to ensure appropriate expertise and institutional balance.

Administrative support for JACHD shall be provided by the Office of the Provost or other administrative office.

## G. Relationship to Senate and Administration

JACHD functions as the deliberative body for honorary degree award nominations.

Its relationship to final action depends on the governance model adopted:

- Under Model A, JACHD's recommendation is forwarded to administration and reported to the Senate.
- Under Model B, JACHD's recommendation proceeds to the Senate for final vote.

In either case, JACHD is responsible for the integrity and completeness of the evaluative record.

In the event that a JACHD recommendation is not advanced by the Chancellor or the President, SR9 recommends that, in the interest of reciprocal transparency and shared governance, the administration provide a brief explanation to JACHD.

## H. Role of the Senate Committee on Honorary Degrees

During the process of transitioning the responsibility for evaluating nominations for honorary degree awards to JACHD, the existing Senate Committee on Honorary Degrees (HD) will be called upon to aid in designing a new, more robust process. HD should take it upon itself to re-evaluate the current criteria for recommending honorary degree awards and prepare a report for the Senate that can be included in the initial charge for JACHD. It is also expected that, given their experience, the current membership of HD would form a natural pool of recommendations for membership on JACHD.

## I. Emphasis on Establishing Internal Support for Nominations

The current process places substantial weight on external letters as the primary source of corroboration beyond the sponsoring unit. External perspectives can provide useful context regarding a nominee's broader professional standing. At the same time, experience suggests that such letters are frequently uniformly positive, can be costly and time-consuming to obtain, and may provide limited incremental evaluative information beyond what is already documented in the nominee's record. Because the honorary degree award is conferred by the University, the decisive judgment must ultimately reflect the University's own assessment of whether the nominee meets its published criteria. SR9, therefore, recommends that JACHD reconsider the relative role and weight of external letters within the overall evaluative framework. External letters should inform the application of published criteria, but they should not function as the sole or primary mechanism for corroborating a nomination beyond the sponsor.

SR9 recommends that the role of external letters be reconsidered. At the same time, the case for a candidate could be strengthened by including additional statements of support from internal constituencies. The recommended process already requires that the nomination be approved by the executive committee (or similar representative body) of the sponsoring unit. Additional letters of support from other colleges, research institutes, etc., would provide additional information on the likely strength and breadth of support for the candidate.

While efforts to document additional support for the candidate reduce the level of confidentiality of the process, it is important to differentiate between the importance of the candidate's privacy and the respect with which their nomination is treated. The sponsor gathering additional internal statements of support for a candidate before submitting it to JACHD, while less private, is respectful of the process and the principle that the university is deliberating whether to award an honor to the candidate. Such statements are gathered as part of the ordinary process of considering awards.

## V. Model A – Final Recommendation by JACHD

### A. Overview

Under Model A, JACHD exercises the Senate's delegated authority to recommend candidates for honorary degree awards. Following its substantive recommendation, the matter is forwarded to administration and placed on the Senate agenda as a **Report for Information**.

As with all reports for information, discussion by senators is permitted. Because the item is presented as a report for information, however, no final action by the Senate is in order at that meeting under the Illinois Open Meetings Act.

Accordingly, the Senate **as a body** may not:

- Approve or reject the individual nomination;

- Amend or refer the recommendation;
- Adopt advisory or symbolic resolutions concerning the nominee; or
- Take any action that would alter the status of a recommendation already forwarded to administration.

Individual senators retain full freedom to speak, ask questions, and express views germane to the agenda item. The limitation applies only to collective final action.

Senators retain the right to introduce resolutions or other items speaking to the recommendation at a future meeting, consistent with Senate rules. Under the Illinois Open Meetings Act, however, such responses would not be in order at the meeting at which the report for information is delivered. Any such subsequent action would not alter or rescind a recommendation that has already been forwarded to administration.

SR9 recognizes that, under typical Senate agendas, items placed in the *Reports for Information* section may receive limited floor attention. The placement of agenda items is governed by the Senate's standing rules and is the responsibility of the Senate Executive Committee (SEC). SR9 suggests, therefore, that in exercising that authority, SEC may consider placing a JACHD recommendation as a distinct report for information (rather than grouped generically with other reports) in order to (1) highlight the award JACHD has recommended and (2) ensure that senators have a clear opportunity to respond.

Final action on individual nominations proceeds through the administrative chain and the Board of Trustees in accordance with established practice.

## B. Structural Rationale and Ongoing Oversight

Model A separates substantive evaluation from final public disposition. JACHD conducts the detailed, criteria-based assessment of nominees and determines whether advancement is warranted. The Senate retains the ability to discuss and respond to recommendations but does not conduct a dispositive vote on individual cases.

Under this structure, the Senate's authority is exercised upstream and structurally. The Senate adopts and revises the criteria governing honorary degrees, establishes and oversees JACHD through its bylaws, recommends membership to JACHD, and conducts periodic review of the process.

Annual light monitoring and a comprehensive review after an initial 3–5 year period are recommended to assess if the structure is functioning as intended and remains aligned with institutional objectives.

This structure reduces the need to resolve complex or contested nominations on the Senate floor, i.e., in a single, compressed public session, while preserving Senate discussion and oversight. By locating substantive evaluation within JACHD and reserving final administrative action to the established chain, Model A is designed to align deliberative responsibility with institutional capacity.

## VI. Model B – Final Recommendation by Senate

### A. Overview

Model B assumes that the Senate retains an up-or-down vote on individual honorary degree award nominees. In doing so, it operates within the structural realities of a large deliberative body meeting on a fixed schedule under the Illinois Open Meetings Act.

The Senate is composed of a broad membership and meets at prescribed intervals. Meetings cannot be easily extended or supplemented, and the agenda must accommodate the full range of statutory and governance responsibilities assigned to the body. Honorary degree awards, while symbolically significant, constitute only one part of the Senate's overall work.

The Illinois Open Meetings Act ensures transparency and public accountability, but it also means that deliberation occurs in a public forum under announced agendas and without the flexibility for informal or iterative reconsideration outside noticed meetings. When new information is introduced for the first time during Senate debate, the structure of a single public session makes it difficult to pause, investigate, and respond in a measured way before final action occurs. These structural features are inherent in the Senate's design.

Because Senate floor expression cannot and should not be restricted, Model B does not attempt to police speech. Instead, it relies on substantive upstream deliberation by JACHD, clear allocation of responsibilities, criteria anchoring, and procedural discipline to ensure that nominations receive full and fair consideration within these structural constraints.

Model B incorporates the possibility of a structured first read (no vote) followed by an opportunity for written follow-up prior to final action. This sequencing is intended to increase the likelihood that senators have adequate opportunity to study the matter, including any new information introduced during debate, before final action occurs. Whether to adopt these steps in any particular case should be left to SEC as part of its ordinary agenda-setting process. However, SR9 strongly believes that, given the structural limitations on substantive debate on the Senate floor, steps that increase the information available to Senators early enough in the process for them to study the issue are key to effective deliberation in the context of Model B.

### B. Senate Consideration and Vote

#### *Stage 0 — SEC Agenda Consideration Under Standing Rule 14*

Following a JACHD recommendation, the commission forwards the nomination to the Senate Executive Committee for placement on the Senate agenda in accordance with Standing Rule 14. As SR14 provides, "The Senate Executive Committee shall invite the representative of the proposed item to the Senate Executive Committee meeting at which the item will be considered for inclusion on the Senate agenda, granting the representative floor privileges." Accordingly, the JACHD chair (or designee) shall be invited to attend that meeting.

SR9 further recommends that the sponsoring dean (or designee) also attend the SEC meeting to address substantive questions regarding the nomination.

For purposes of agenda consideration under SR14, JACHD recommendations shall be treated in the same manner as items originating from a standing committee of the Senate. SEC retains its ordinary authority under SR14, including the ability to refer or postpone consideration once, but no additional or special procedural authority is created under this model.

While it is possible that recommendations for honorary degree awards can be forwarded to the Senate without SEC being aware of the candidates' identities, it is necessary for SEC to know the nature of the case in order for it to properly exercise its discretion whether to require a first read and written question period.

In what follows, for illustration the process is written as if there is a first read and written question period. However, these steps could be omitted.

### *Stage 1 — First Read (Discussion Only)*

The nomination appears on the Senate agenda as a First Read item for discussion only. No vote is permitted at this stage.

At this meeting:

- Criteria are projected at First Read.
- The presiding officer states that the formal decision to recommend is an application of the written criteria.
- The JACHD chair presents the Commission's evaluative record and explains how the criteria, including the professional integrity standard, were applied.
- The sponsoring unit representative presents and defends the substantive merits of the nomination.
- Any motion for final action is out of order.
- Senators may ask questions and raise concerns framed in relation to the written criteria.
- The presiding officer should ensure that the sponsoring representative has an opportunity to respond to substantive questions before debate concludes.

Following the First Read meeting, senators may submit written follow-up questions within a defined period. JACHD and the sponsoring unit shall confer as appropriate to prepare responses. Where practicable, written responses may be circulated with the materials for the subsequent meeting at which final action is scheduled.

Prior to final action, the item returns to the SEC for placement on the agenda in accordance with Standing Rule 14. SEC's role at this stage remains agenda-setting and procedural; it does not constitute endorsement of the nomination on the merits.

## *Stage 2 — Final Action*

At a subsequent meeting, the nomination appears on the agenda for final action. At this meeting:

- Criteria are projected at Final Action.
- The presiding officer states that the formal decision is an application of written criteria.
- Debate occurs in accordance with Senate rules and applicable law.
- Ordinary parliamentary motions remain available, including motions to postpone or refer, consistent with Senate rules.
- The presiding officer should ensure that the sponsoring representative has an opportunity to respond before the vote is taken.

At the close of debate, the Senate conducts an up-or-down vote.

If approved, the recommendation proceeds through the administrative chain and the Board of Trustees. If rejected, the nomination concludes for that cycle.

## **C. Role of the Senate Executive Committee**

Under Model B, the SEC exercises its ordinary agenda-setting authority pursuant to Standing Rule 14. SEC may refer items back to committee once for further study, consistent with existing Senate rules.

SEC currently has the ability to place an item on the Senate agenda as a no-vote report for information (“First Read”). SEC should retain this ability for honorary degree awards. Whether SEC has the ability to create a written comment period is not clear and may need to be addressed in the Senate’s governing documents (although this would certainly be allowable with the consent of the sponsor).

No additional procedural authority is created for SEC under this model.

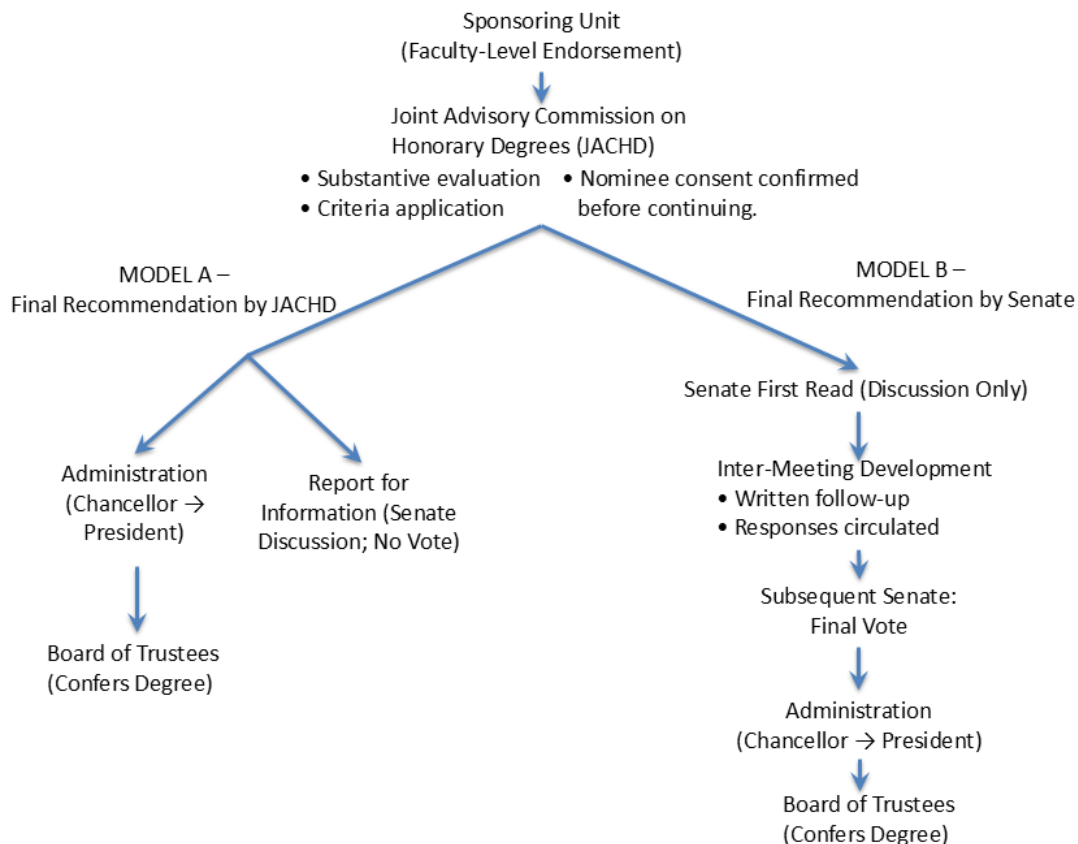
## **D. Nominee Consent and Withdrawal**

Nominee consent must be confirmed prior to advancement by JACHD. Nominees are informed that public discussion and, under Model B, a Senate vote may occur.

A nominee may withdraw at any time prior to final Senate action.

## VII. Comparative Structural Analysis

Figure 1 illustrates the process under Model A and Model B.



*Figure 1. Honorary Degree Process Flow Under Model A and Model B*

Both models share a common deliberative structure through JACHD. In each case, substantive evaluation of nominees occurs within JACHD; sponsoring units must provide faculty-level endorsement; criteria anchoring and integrity review are required; nominee consent is confirmed prior to advancement; and reciprocal transparency between JACHD and administration is recommended. The models differ primarily in where final Senate action occurs.

| <b>Dimension</b>                                            | <b>Model A – Final Recommendation by JACHD</b>                                  | <b>Model B – Final Recommendation by Senate</b>                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Location of Substantive Deliberation                        | JACHD conducts full substantive evaluation and issues the final recommendation. | JACHD conducts substantive evaluation; the Senate conducts final deliberation and vote. |
| Senate Vote on Individual Nominees                          | No Senate vote on individual nominees.                                          | Senate conducts an up-or-down vote on individual nominees.                              |
| Form in which Senate authority is exercised                 | Exercised through discussion, structural oversight, and upstream governance.    | Exercised through visible up-or-down vote of the Senate.                                |
| Alignment with Structural Constraints (Size, Schedule, OMA) | Concentrates dispositive deliberation in a smaller, more flexible body.         | Requires final action within the full Senate format and meeting constraints.            |
| Risk of Compressed Floor Adjudication                       | Reduced.                                                                        | Mitigated through First Read and inter-meeting development, but not eliminated.         |
| Implementation Complexity                                   | Requires bylaw amendment and structural transition to JACHD.                    | Requires bylaw amendment to establish JACHD; retains Senate vote structure.             |
| Confidentiality of Process                                  | Deliberation confidential; name becomes public when reported to Senate.         | Initial deliberation confidential; public deliberation and vote at Senate.              |

## VIII. Conclusion

The central recommendation of this report is the establishment of a Joint Advisory Commission on Honorary Degrees (JACHD) as the University's primary deliberative body for evaluating honorary degree nominations. Regardless of whether final Senate action occurs through discussion alone (Model A) or through an up-or-down vote (Model B), JACHD provides a broader, more representative, and more flexible structure for substantive review than is available within a standing committee of the Senate operating under the Illinois Open Meetings Act.

A standing Senate committee such as the current Senate Committee on Honorary Degrees is itself an OMA body and therefore subject to many of the same structural constraints as the full Senate, albeit on a smaller scale. JACHD, by contrast, is designed to allow for more sustained

deliberation, broader participation across disciplinary and institutional lines, and clearer allocation of responsibility between evaluation and advocacy.

Honorary degree awards are conferred by the University and represent an institutional honor. The Senate is entrusted by the *Statutes* with recommending candidates, but the recognition itself is a University distinction. The governance structure adopted should therefore reflect both the Senate's statutory role and the broader institutional character of the award. At the same time, because honorary degree awards are academic recognitions, faculty judgment should play a primary role in their evaluation.

Model A and Model B differ principally in where final Senate action occurs. Model A locates dispositive authority in JACHD while preserving Senate discussion and structural oversight. Model B retains the Senate's visible up-or-down vote while incorporating staged deliberation and criteria anchoring to support careful consideration. Both models preserve meaningful faculty voice and recognize the importance of visible Senate authority.

SR9 presents these models as viable alternative structures grounded in the same shared reforms and objectives. The choice between them ultimately turns on judgments about how best to align substantive evaluation, the manner in which the Senate exercises its role in shared governance, and the structural realities under which the Senate operates.

## Appendix A: What Our Peers Do

### Purpose & Methods

While the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Senate should develop an honorary degree award process that is best suited to the needs of the University of Illinois, the Ninth Senate Review Commission felt it would be prudent to review what other peer institutions are doing. Peer institutions included our system universities, universities in Illinois, and universities in the Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA). A review of publicly available information on each of the universities' honorary degree award processes was compared to the honorary degree award process at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign process. The comparison included analysis of what language in other honorary degree award processes is essentially the same as UIUC's honorary degree award process. In addition, differences between other universities' honorary degree award processes and UIUC's process were noted. Finally, a very basic analysis of the number of universities with similar or different processes was conducted.

### Results & Discussion

#### *Comparison to UIUC's Honorary Degree Award Language*

Overall, and not wholly unexpected, UIUC's honorary degree award process is one of the most rigorous honorary degree award processes. While many other universities have an HD committee, very few have their HD committee connected to their senate. There were mixed levels of universities requiring strict confidentiality vs. having the process fully open. Nearly all universities agreed that honorary degree awards should be awarded to both scholarship and creative activities connected to one's professional achievements. However, there was strong difference in most other universities not requiring that the achievement be over the length of an entire career, not being a single achievement, and not being solely for recognition of philanthropy. Most universities agreed that honorary degree awards should not be awarded to current faculty/staff and not posthumously. However, there was significant disagreement with not being able to award an honorary degree to a member of the legislature while in office or not being able to self-nominate. Nearly all universities have an HD committee reviewing the nomination packets before going to an authoritative body (e.g., provost, chancellor, senate, etc.), and basic information on the candidate (e.g., name, contact info, curriculum vitae type information). However, many universities differed on requiring departmental support, and letters of support (either internal or external).

#### *Honorary Degree Award Process Language at Peer Universities not Included in UIUC's Honorary Degree Award*

##### Policy

- Indiana University has language that the state laws take precedence over honorary degree award program policies if there is a conflict between honorary degree award policies and the law.

- The University of Maryland System and the University of Nebraska System have honorary degree award policies and requirements that are the same for the entire system.
- The University of Nebraska System limits one honorary degree award per person.
- Some universities allowed honorary degree awards to be accepted at other prestigious university-hosted events outside of commencement.
- At University of Illinois-Springfield, recommendations for honorary degree awards originate in academic units and are considered for potential action by the campus-wide Sabbaticals and Awards Committee. This committee is coordinated by the UIS Office of the Provost and is not subject to the Open Meetings Act. Before a recommendation to grant the honorary degree award is forwarded to the senate, the nominee is contacted to confirm willingness to be considered.
- At University of Illinois-Chicago, a senate committee considers nominations and forwards their recommendations to the Senate Executive Committee (SEC). The SEC must approve the nomination before it is placed on a senate agenda. If the SEC decides to place the nomination on the senate agenda, efforts are made to ensure that the chair of the nomination committee and the sponsors of the recommendation will be present at the meeting to respond to any questions that may arise.
  - UIC is reviewing its current processes.

### Guidelines

- Several universities had bonus points or required there be a prior connection to the university for an honorary degree to be awarded.

### Procedures

- Several universities have online forms for submitting honorary degree award packets. (If UIUC switched to this, it may help with meeting digital and web accessibility laws and standards.)
- Several universities provide an email to submit questions about the honorary degree award process instead of only a phone number.
- Several universities have standardized and posted a timeline for their honorary degree award process noting which date submissions need to be in by to be considered for a specific year's ceremony.

## Appendix B: Supplemental Considerations for the Evaluation Process

The following considerations were developed during SR9's review of the honorary degree award process. They are not model-dependent and are offered to inform bylaw drafting and the development of JACHD's operating procedures under either governance structure. The Commission does not prescribe these measures but strongly recommends that JACHD consider them in establishing a robust, criteria-centered evaluation process.

### 1. Criteria-Centered Evaluation

Honorary degree award deliberation should be anchored explicitly in the published criteria at every stage of review.

- Each nomination should include a written mapping of the nominee's achievements to the published criteria.
- JACHD should document how each relevant criterion has been evaluated and satisfied.
- Evaluation should focus on whether the nominee meets articulated standards rather than on extraneous considerations.
- In recognition of the honorary degree award as a university-wide honor, the nomination should speak to how awarding an honorary degree to the candidate would contribute to the University's overall mission.

### 2. Professional Integrity and Conduct Standard

SR9 recommends that the Senate consider adopting an explicit professional integrity and conduct standard as part of the honorary degree criteria. However, the authority to establish or revise criteria resides with the Senate. Should the Senate adopt such a standard—whether in the form recommended in this report or in modified form—it is important that the standard be clearly articulated and applied consistently throughout the evaluation process.

- The nomination record should reflect how any adopted integrity or conduct standard was considered.
- Evaluation should distinguish between substantiated conduct relevant to published criteria and public controversy unrelated to institutional standards.
- Lawful political positions, advocacy, or partisan affiliation should not, standing alone, constitute grounds for disqualification unless the adopted criteria expressly provide otherwise.
- If integrity considerations are likely to be addressed in public deliberation, it is appropriate that the standard being applied be explicit in advance rather than introduced ad hoc during debate.

### 3. Sponsoring Unit Responsibilities and Internal Support

The burden of advocacy rests with the sponsoring unit, not the JACHD or other nominating body. Internal support should be clearly documented and reflect meaningful faculty-level consideration.

- Nominations should include documented faculty-level endorsement (e.g., executive committee approval or equivalent governance review).
- The nomination record should reflect substantive internal consideration within the sponsoring unit rather than isolated advocacy.
- Where appropriate, additional internal statements of support (e.g., from other colleges, institutes, or campus constituencies) may be included to document the breadth of recognition within the University community.
- While broader internal consultation may modestly reduce confidentiality at the early stage of consideration, the risk to nominees at the sponsoring-unit level is limited, as the nomination has not yet been advanced beyond internal governance review.
- Sponsoring units should be prepared to respond to substantive questions regarding the nominee's qualifications and the basis for their endorsement.

#### **4. External Letters and Their Role**

The current guidelines require identification of at least four professionally distinguished individuals who may be contacted for letters of support. External perspectives can provide useful context regarding a nominee's broader professional standing. At the same time, experience suggests that such letters are frequently uniformly positive and may add limited incremental evaluative value beyond what is already documented in the nominee's record. JACHD may therefore wish to reassess the role and weight of external letters within a criteria-centered review process.

- Consider whether the required number of external letter writers remains appropriate.
- Clarify the specific evaluative purpose external letters are intended to serve.
- Ensure that external letters inform the application of published criteria rather than substitute for institutional judgment.
- Assess whether greater emphasis should be placed on documented internal deliberation and faculty-level endorsement.

#### **5. Documentation and Substantive Determination**

A structured evaluative record supports institutional legitimacy and clarity.

- JACHD should provide a substantive endorsement of the case and not function as a purely procedural screening body.
- JACHD should maintain documentation sufficient to demonstrate procedural completeness and substantive review.

- The record should distinguish clearly between sponsoring unit advocacy and JACHD's independent evaluative judgment.
- Meaningful institutional support is required for nominations. A complete dossier alone is not sufficient.

## **6. Nominee Consent and Communication**

Clear communication protocols are essential to protect nominee dignity.

- Nominee consent should be confirmed prior to advancement beyond JACHD.
- Nominees should be informed of the procedural stages that may involve public discussion or action.
- Communication with nominees should be coordinated and consistent.
- Procedures should avoid ambiguity regarding nominee awareness of their status in the process.

## **7. Calendar and Sequencing**

The structure of review should allow sufficient time for careful deliberation and institutional coordination.

- Evaluation timelines should provide adequate opportunity for reflection, clarification, and documentation.
- Each stage of the process, including final advancement, should occur with sufficient lead time for administrative and Board processes.
- The process should avoid compressed sequencing that limits review or creates avoidable scheduling pressure.
- In the event that a full substantive review cannot be completed in time to meet a particular institutional deadline, including commencement, JACHD should be prepared to defer the nomination to a subsequent cycle rather than truncate deliberation.

## **8. Reconsideration of the Link to Commencement**

- While honorary degree awards have traditionally been conferred at commencement, consideration may be given to recognizing awardees at other appropriate institutional occasions. Commencement remains an option, but alignment between deliberative integrity and event scheduling should guide final sequencing decisions.
- In recognition of the nature of the honorary degree as an award conveyed by the university community and its distinction from earned degrees, there may be institutional value in creating a separate occasion to more fully celebrate the achievements of the honorary degree award recipients.

## **9. Periodic Review of Process**

Governance structures benefit from ongoing evaluation.

- JACHD's procedures should be subject to periodic review to ensure continued alignment with Senate objectives and statutory requirements.
- Annual light monitoring and periodic structural review are recommended.
- Adjustments to internal procedures should be documented and reported to the Senate as appropriate.