



**Rutgers University Senate
University Structure and Governance Committee
November 2015
Amended February/April 2016**

**Response to Charge S-1410 on Honorary Degree and
Commencement Speaker Selection Processes - Amended**

Charge S-1410: Honorary Degree and Commencement Speaker Selection Processes and Related Senate Committee: Formulate details of processes to be used to facilitate the [proposal submitted to President Barchi on Charge S-1405 on Procedures for Selecting Commencement Speakers and Honorary Degree Recipients](#). [See also [President Barchi's response](#) to that proposal.]

Background: Rutgers has used multiple mechanisms for selecting honorary-degree recipients and commencement speakers over the last several years. The selection of Condoleezza Rice as the 2014 commencement speaker and honorary-degree recipient, and the ensuing controversy, demonstrated the need for a more open process to vet and select recipients.

The University Senate Executive Committee, on the Senate's behalf, discussed, formulated, and proposed to President Barchi a plan to provide input from representatives of all Rutgers constituent groups¹. President Barchi agreed with some of the provisions of the report, but asked for modifications to some others. With modifications to the original proposal, the Executive Committee then constituted an ad hoc committee to review nominations for honorary-degree recipients and commencement speakers for the 2015 and 2016 New Brunswick/Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) commencement ceremonies, and make recommendations based on the members' perceived appropriateness of the nominees. The Newark Chancellor and Camden Provost constituted similar committees for their own units², which were to include the Senate Executive Committee members of their respective units.

¹ University Senate report S-1405 Procedures for Selecting Commencement Speakers and Honorary Degree Recipients:
<http://senate.rutgers.edu/EConS1405HonoraryDegreesCommencementSpeakersWithAppendicesJuly2014.pdf>

² In this document, the term "units" references the following Rutgers University entities: Rutgers University – Camden (R-C), Rutgers University – Newark (R-N), Rutgers University – New Brunswick (R-NB), and Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS)

In this modified process, the Office of the Secretary of the University sent nominations and corresponding documentation to the Executive Secretary of the Senate for R-NB and RBHS nominees, and directly to the chancellors of R-N and R-C for their respective unit's nominees. The Executive Secretary of the University Senate then convened the Ad Hoc Honorary Degree Committee for the R-NB/RBHS commencement.

This process helped to provide the framework for the overarching University Commencement Panel (UCP) and the unit-specific Commencement Committees (CC) proposed later in this report. The design of that model is intended to ensure that the recommended Commencement Committees for all parts of the system are able to form, and to provide appropriate vetting of all potential candidates.

Considerations: Senate Executive Committee Report S-1405 states:

"It is clear that, given recent changes in University structure and the replacement of a university-wide commencement by three separate campus-based commencements, a new policy inclusive of adequate representation of faculty, students, staff, and alumni is needed. In keeping with the desire for free and open discourse within the Rutgers community, the Executive Committee on behalf of the Senate made recommendations for a revised policy for selection of honorary degree recipients and commencement speakers."

(The full report by the Executive Committee can be found at <http://senate.rutgers.edu/EConS1405HonoraryDegreesCommencementSpeakersWithAppendicesJuly2014.pdf>.)

For the purposes of the 2017 commencement and beyond, the Senate's University Structure and Governance Committee (USGC) has been tasked to discuss, develop, and recommend a process and committee structure that will discuss and rank nominees.

Subsequent USGC discussions recognized that:

- i) The University Senate is the one body that encompasses all of our communities.
- ii) University commencement is a time to celebrate the achievements of the undergraduate and graduate students and the faculty.
- iii) Honorary-degree recipients and commencement speakers bring attention to the role and impact of Rutgers University in our society.
- iv) Awarding honorary degrees and inviting commencement speakers honors those who are selected by the University, and reflects on the vibrancy and mission of the University within the State of New Jersey, the United States, and the world.
- v) The selection process should be inclusive, transparent, and flexible.

After deliberating, the USGC adopted the following recommendations regarding the process to select honorary-degree recipients and commencement speakers.

Recommendations

I. Committees

1. Create a component of the University Senate, named “University Commencement Panel” (UCP)
 - i) The UCP will be composed of members with representation from each unit (R-C, R-N, R-NB, RBHS), as follows:
 - a. Executive Secretary of the Senate (non-voting)
 - b. Vice Chair of the Senate (chair of UCP)
 - c. Four Faculty Senators, with each of the following groups being represented:
 - Tenure-track (TT), non-tenure-track (NTT), and part-time lecturers (PTL)
 - d. One Staff Senator
 - e. One Alumni Senator
 - f. Two Student Senators
 - ii) The UCP will be responsible for:
 - a. Convening at least twice per year
 - b. Soliciting, from among the membership of the Senate, nominations for membership on Commencement Committees (CC), as defined below
 - c. Selecting, from among those nominations for CCs, three faculty members and two students for each of the CCs
2. Once a year, the University Senate’s Executive Committee will:
 - i) solicit nominations from the University Senate for membership on the UCP
 - ii) appoint members to the UCP from among those nominations
3. Commencement Committees will:
 - i) be appointed by the respective chancellor(s) for each of the following commencement ceremonies [prior to solicitation of nominations by the Secretary of the University:](#)
 - a. R-C
 - b. R-N
 - c. R-NB/RBHS
 - ii) be comprised of:
 - a. four designees³ chosen by that unit’s chancellor

³ In the case of the combined R-NB/RBHS commencement, both chancellors will make those appointments from among the respective R-NB and RBHS constituencies. For the chancellors’ four

- b. five Senators³ from that unit, consisting of three faculty and two students selected by the UCP
- iii) select their chair from among the members of their CC
- iv) research and consider those individuals nominated for:
 - a. an honorary degree from their unit
 - b. invitation to speak at their commencement

II. Selection Process

1. Each year, the Secretary of the University will provide each CC with nomination packets for their respective units (the RBHS-New Brunswick CC will receive the packets for each of those two units). Confidentiality regarding the names and credentials of nominees shall be observed by the CCs.
2. Each CC will evaluate their nomination packets, and will compile a list of those candidates they find suitable to receive an honorary degree and/or as a commencement speaker. Note that a nominee could potentially be selected as both honorary-degree recipient and commencement speaker. The approved candidates will be ranked by the committee, and submitted as a packet to the respective chancellor(s). Copies of the packets shall also be sent to the Secretary of the University.
3. In consultation with the University President, each of the chancellors will select honorary-degree recipient(s) and commencement speaker(s) from their CC's [rankings list of approved candidates](#), and will forward their selections to the Board of Governors' Committee on University Relations [for endorsement consideration](#), who, in line with current practice, will forward the names of those proposed honorary-degree recipients and commencement speakers to the Board of Governors for approval.
4. No final candidates shall be selected without having been considered by the respective CC.

Resolution:

Be it resolved that the University Senate:

Endorses the USGC's Recommendations as contained in this report regarding the process to select honorary-degree recipients and commencement

designees, two will be from R-NB and two from RBHS. For the two Student Senators, one each from R-NB and RBHS. For the three Faculty Senators, at least one from R-NB and at least one from RBHS.

speakers; and asks the University administration to implement that process going forward, starting with 2017 commencement.

Be it further resolved, that if these recommendations are accepted by the University, then the Handbook of the Rutgers University Senate should be updated as follows.

i) In Article VII. B., the sentence

“The vice chair acts as chair of the Appeals Panel if an appeal is being heard, and reports on Executive Committee action at Senate meetings.”

should be replaced with the sentence

“The vice chair acts as chair of the University Commencement Panel and of the Appeals Panel if an appeal is being heard, and reports on Executive Committee action at Senate meetings.”

ii) In Article VIII. A., the sentence

“Procedures concerning the structure and operation of committees were approved by the University Senate on May 5, 1974, and amended April 28, 1995.”

should be replaced with the sentence

“Procedures concerning the structure and operation of committees were approved by the University Senate on May 5, 1974, and amended April 28, 1995 and [INSERT DATE OF THIS AMENDMENT’S ADOPTION].”

iii) In Article VIII. D., append the following text

“11. University Commencement Panel

Standing Charge: The University Commencement Panel (UCP) shall be appointed by the Executive Committee at the beginning of each year and shall consist of the Vice Chair of the Senate, serving as chair of the UCP; four faculty senators (one each from Camden, Newark, New Brunswick, and RBHS, and including at least one tenure-track, one non-tenure-track, and one part-time lecturer senator); two student senators; one staff senator; one alumni senator; and the Executive Secretary of the Senate (non-voting). Members will be appointed to this panel in addition to their regular committee duties, with the following responsibilities:

- *Identify and select faculty and student senators to serve on the Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick/RBHS Commencement Committees (which vet and rank nominations for honorary degrees and for commencement speakers), as follows:*
 - *three faculty senators from the respective campus (in the case of New Brunswick/RBHS, at least one from each)*
 - *two student senators from the respective campus (in the case of New Brunswick/RBHS, at least one from each)*
- *Advise the chancellors on a timely basis of the names of those selected for appointment.”*

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