

Commencement Ceremonies at Ohio Faculty Council Institutions

Executive Summary

During the months of October and November, 2013 representatives of the Ohio Faculty Council were asked a series of four questions pertaining to the commencement ceremonies at their institutions: 1) what role do faculty play in planning commencement ceremonies, 2) are any other ceremonies held in conjunction with commencement ceremonies, 3) how well attended are commencement ceremonies by faculty and graduates, and 4) how are honorary degrees awarded? Responses were received from most of the OFC institutions and information was available from the university web pages of several that did not respond.

The role of faculty in planning commencement ceremonies varies widely from one university to the next. As a rule, university administrators play the primary role in organizing and executing commencement ceremonies. At a few universities faculty exercise an oversight role and/or play prominent roles as marshals during commencements.

Some universities link university-wide commencement ceremonies with college- or even department-specific awards or recognition ceremonies. Nursing colleges in particular seem inclined to hold separate pinning ceremonies prior to university commencements.

None of the universities in the OFC seem to be satisfied with faculty attendance at commencement ceremonies. Only 10 to 25% of eligible faculty attend most commencements. No university has specific incentives in place to encourage faculty to attend though at least two (Wright State and Youngstown State) have collective bargaining agreements that require regular attendance (though these requirements do not seem to be enforced). Student attendance regularly exceeds 60% but is often less for more advanced degrees (e.g. MS and PhD degrees).

The role of faculty in selecting honorary degree recipients also varies widely from one university to the next – often in a way that parallels the extent to which faculty are involved in planning commencement ceremonies. At a few universities faculty play a prominent role in the soliciting of nominations and the initial selection of honorary degree candidates. University presidents and boards of trustees have final say regarding honorary degrees at all OFC universities for which information was available.

Summaries of institution-specific answers to questions about commencement ceremonies:

I. Faculty role in planning of commencement ceremonies

Akron (derived from university webpages)

References are made to a commencement committee, but the degree of faculty involvement and the role the committee plays is unclear.

Bowling Green (derived from university webpages)

A university Commencement Committee does not include faculty – all representatives are from administrative units. There is an Honors & Awards Committee with faculty representation (4 faculty, 3 students) that screens the list of candidates for academic honors prior to commencement.

Central State

All facets of commencement ceremony planning are accomplished by administrative units.

Cincinnati (Dr. Adrienne Lane, Faculty Senate Chair-Elect)

Faculty participate as marshals for each college and Faculty Senate Chair officiates the ceremony. Faculty who are not marshals are seated in a special faculty section. Faculty members are involved in rehearsal for graduation.

Kent State (Dr. Kara Robinson, Co-Chair KSU Commencement Committee)

KSU's Senate has a standing "Committee on Committees" that is chaired by the Vice Chair of Senate. Once a year that body appoints members to university-wide committees, including the Commencement Committee.

There is an administrative office charged with the bulk of the planning. That office arranges the set-up of the ceremony site, edits and produces the programs, etc. A small "leadership" group from within the Commencement Committee works with that office to review the previous ceremony, highlighting issues that arose and making suggestion to make the ceremony run more smoothly. The faculty who serve on the Commencement Committee largely work day of ceremony, running the student side of the house (check-in, line-up, processional) and the front of the house (greeting guests, seating individuals with reserved special needs seating). A smaller number of us work during the ceremony itself to get the students across the stage with the correct college and to make sure the recessional goes off correctly.

The Chair of the Faculty Senate serves as Faculty Marshall at each Commencement.

Miami (derived from university webpages)

Commencement speakers (non-honorary degree) are selected by 10-member committee of faculty, staff & students (appointed by the university president).

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Ohio State (Dr. Leslie Alexander, Faculty Council Chair)

Commencement ceremonies at OSU are largely planned by staff people in the Office of the President. Faculty choose the honorary degree recipients and participate actively in the ceremonies but the bulk of the planning is handled by staff people.

Ohio University (derived from university webpages)

Event Services is responsible for the ceremony. A university-level Commencement Committee exists, but it's chaired by the head of Event Services. A separate committee composed of mostly faculty makes honorary degree recommendations.

Shawnee State (Dr. Andrew Feight, Faculty Senate President)

Faculty play little role in the planning of commencement ceremonies. A committee with faculty representation makes recommendations regarding regalia displays for students and faculty. Final decisions are made by a team of administrators.

Toledo (derived from university webpages)

The university's College of Pharmacy has its own commencement committee with faculty representatives but it is unclear how the general commencement ceremony is planned. There appear to be no Faculty Senate committees that deal specifically with commencement.

Wright State (Eric Rowley, chair of the Senate Commencement Committee)

The Faculty Senate's Commencement Committee has oversight over commencement ceremonies but has generally allowed WSU's Event Services department to plan and execute the logistics of the ceremony. Faculty Senate Executive Committee members serve as marshals for their respective colleges, with the Faculty President presiding as Grand Marshal. The Senate Commencement Committee solicits nominations for honorary degree recipients and determines if nominees should be passed on to the university president for final consideration.

Youngstown State (Dr. Chet Cooper, Academic Senate Chair)

Faculty have little input into commencement ceremonies, although the Senate Charter/By-Laws indicate that they should have a larger role. It is not entirely clear why faculty have not been active participants in the planning of commencement ceremonies. The YSU Academic Senate does put forth names for the Mace Bearer and suggestions for commencement speakers. Faculty are recruited to be marshals. Recently, the choice of commencement speakers has improved over the past year, but faculty input still seems to be lacking.

II. Other ceremonies held in conjunction with commencement

Akron (derived from university webpages)

May 2, 2013 Senate minutes mention five separate commencement ceremonies

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Bowling Green

Multiple commencement ceremonies are held.

Central State (derived from university webpages)

Senior class picnic, legacy class diner, faculty/staff breakfast, commencement reception, invitation-only commencement reception, appreciation picnic

Cincinnati (Dr. Adrienne Lane, Faculty Senate Chair-Elect)

Some colleges have special receptions. The College of Nursing has a special reception for graduate students. Also the College of Nursing has a separate pinning ceremony. There is a university-wide reception after the all university commencement.

Kent State (Dr. Kara Robinson, Co-Chair KSU Commencement Committee)

College of Nursing holds a separate pinning ceremony. Each regional campus holds a separate ceremony.

NEOMED (derived from university webpages)

Several commencement related events including Residency "Match" celebrations, college-level award ceremonies & receptions, and a formal Commencement Ball.

Ohio State (Dr. Leslie Alexander, Faculty Council Chair)

There are usually ceremonies held on either the departmental or College level, which faculty organize.

Ohio University (derived from university webpages)

Multiple ceremonies (AM/PM & UG/Grad), College receptions

Shawnee State (Dr. Andrew Feight, Faculty Senate President)

There are departmental/programmatic and honor society events.

Toledo

Separate ceremonies for Engineering, Law, & Nursing

Wright State

The Medical School has a separate ceremony. All other colleges participate in a single, university-wide commencement. Some colleges (e.g. Nursing and Health) have separate recognition ceremonies before the university-wide event.

Youngstown State (Dr. Chet Cooper, Academic Senate Chair)

Honors Convocation in the Spring to recognize student and faculty scholars.

III. Fraction of graduates and faculty that attend commencement

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Cincinnati (Dr. Adrienne Lane, Faculty Senate Chair-Elect)

A maximum of about 50 of our over 4,000 faculty attend. Faculty are not specifically encouraged to attend. In 2013 faculty took on the role of being marshals and started we seated as part of the platform party. Regalia rental is provided at no cost to faculty as long as they order it well in advance. A reduced rate is provided for faculty regalia purchase through the bookstore.

Kent State (Dr. Kara Robinson, Co-Chair KSU Commencement Committee)

Graduates - around 60% attendance, less for advanced degree ceremonies.

The number of faculty varies greatly but has not been much higher than 50, not counting the committee members or faculty attending Commencement in order to hood doctoral candidates.

Ohio State (Dr. Leslie Alexander, Faculty Council Chair)

There are no specific incentives for faculty to participate.

Shawnee State (Dr. Andrew Feight, Faculty Senate President)

About 1/4 attend; there are no incentives

Wright State (Dr. Eric Rowley, chair Commencement Committee)

Faculty are contractually obligated to attend one out of every two commencement ceremonies, on average, but this is disregarded by many. Approximately 20% of faculty attend each ceremony. There are no specific incentives to attend and apparently no consequences for not attending – at least for most colleges (some colleges, such as Nursing and Health have very high attendance rates and link merit pay increases in part to participation in such events). A standing committee of the Faculty Senate, the Commencement Committee, is exploring ways of more actively engaging all faculty in these ceremonies.

Youngstown State (Dr. Chet Cooper, Academic Senate Chair)

Faculty are contractually obligated to attend 1 out of every 3 commencement ceremonies, on average, but this mandate is routinely violated by many. Approximately 10-20% of faculty attend each ceremony (out of about 400 full time faculty). There is no incentive to attend and apparently no real consequences for not attending.

IV. Criteria & Process for choosing honorary degree recipients

Akron (derived from university webpages)

Nominations made by Board of Trustee members are considered only by the Board itself; colleges have their own nomination committees that submit nominations to their dean, after dean approval nominations are reviewed by a university honorary

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degree recommendation committee (1 faculty member from each college plus libraries); final recommendations are sent to the Senior VP and Provost and then University President and forwarded to Board of Trustees after presidential approval.

Bowling Green

A Faculty Senate Honorary Degree Committee recommends to the Board of Trustees (through the President of the University) the names of individuals deemed worthy by the BGSU faculty of receiving BGSU honorary degrees; to nominate to the Board of Trustees (through the Vice President for Academic Affairs) faculty members deemed worthy of emeritus status.

There is the following language in the Ohio Revised Code pertaining to BGSU and Kent State:

"On the recommendation of the faculty, the Board of Trustees may confer such honorary degrees as are customarily conferred by colleges of liberal arts in the United States." (Section 7924-2, General Code, as amended May 15-17, 1935 of Section 3341.05 Ohio Revised Code.)

Central State (derived from university webpages)

Faculty Handbook (2010) lists a Committee on Academic Calendar & Honorary Degrees (University Senate Committee). The committee reviews and forwards recommendations to University Senate; University President transmits final recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

Cincinnati (Dr. Adrienne Lane, Faculty Senate Chair-Elect)

The Board of Trustees Committee on University Honors is comprised of thirteen members appointed by, and advisory to, the president of the university. Members of this committee include representatives from the following constituencies: trustees, cabinet, deans, faculty*, students and the Cincinnati community. The term of service is two years and may be extended by reappointment.

After considering nominations and supporting materials, the committee forwards their recommendations to the Executive Committee of the President's Cabinet and to the Office of Legal Affairs for review. Nominations from the Executive Committee go to the president and then on to the Board of Trustees which has final decision-making authority for honorary degrees.

*The 2012 Committee contained no current faculty members; 2013 roster not posted on website

Kent State (Dr. Kara Robinson, Co-Chair KSU Commencement Committee)

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There is a separate faculty committee (the Citation and Recognition Committee), which is appointed by the university president from nominations made by the Faculty Senate. The committee works with written guidelines for its deliberations.

Miami (derived from university webpages)

“The Awards and Recognition Committee, which is advisory to the President and the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, shall be composed of six (6) tenured faculty members, at least one of whom shall be a member of the University Senate; one (1) member who is a past recipient of the Benjamin Harrison Medallion, or University Distinguished Professor Award, or Distinguished Service Award. As part of its responsibilities, the Committee shall serve as the screening and nominating Committee for honorary degrees. The Secretary of University Senate or his or her designee shall serve as Committee secretary without vote. Nominations for honorary degrees shall be accepted from the entire University community.

Candidates can be either alumni that have made substantial contributions to University or community or any individual of regional, national, or international reputation.”

NEOMED (derived from university webpages)

Nominations are submitted to the Office of the President. An Honorary Doctoral Degree Committee (comprised of: two Board of Trustee Members, University President, three senior faculty) reviews nominations and makes recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

Ohio State (Dr. Leslie Alexander, Faculty Council Chair)

Honorary degree recipients are chosen by a Senate committee composed of faculty members who receive nominations, review the materials, and nominate recipients for approval by the Senate Steering committee.

Ohio University (derived from university webpages)

A committee of four faculty, two administrative staff, and two students review public nominations and forward recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

Shawnee State (Dr. Andrew Feight, Faculty Senate President)

Any university governance body may nominate individuals for an honorary degree. Nominations are normally reviewed and recommended by the President to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees for action. The Board of Trustees policy states: "Nominations must include a detailed description of the nominee and justification for awarding an honorary degree. Normally, the Board's Executive Committee shall receive nominations for potential honorary degree recipients not less than 120 days prior to the date on which the degree would be awarded. The Board of Trustees reserves the right to nominate and approve candidates for

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honorary degrees. The final decision to award an honorary degree rests with the Board of Trustees."

Toledo

Nominations are made to a University Academic Honors Committee (chaired by an Associate Provost/Dean); the committee makes recommendations directly to the Board of Trustees.

Wright State (Faculty Constitution and By-laws)

The Faculty Senate Commencement Committee receives nominations from faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees and then, after deliberation, submits their recommendations to the University President and Board of Trustees for final approval. Honorary degrees typically are reserved for individuals whose careers or actions have contributed significantly to Wright State or the local community/region.

Youngstown State (Chet Cooper, Academic Senate Chair)

There is a Board of Trustees policy for awarding honorary degrees, but it is quite vague on the qualities required by the recipient. The vagueness of the process lends to a perception that the honor is used as a "reward". Faculty seem to have had little input in the past and the Provost/President has not sought out faculty input, instead relying on other sources (e.g., Deans). However, this is partly the fault of the Academic Senate for not actively pushing nominees. Clearly, the Board policy needs revision and faculty need to become more involved.