

doctor honoris causa

HONORARY DOCTORATE or doctor honoris causa

The rank of honorary doctorate or doctor honoris causa is an honorific title granted by an exceptional procedure. Originally a university would confer the dignity of doctor honoris causa in order to distinguish a learned person whose knowledge and wisdom were considered exemplary, but also, in return, to pride itself for having recognized and "recruited" among its faculty such an outstanding person. Formerly universities have given some more picturesque titles than doctor honoris causa, like doctor or professor angelicus, eximius, mirabilis, subtilis, illuminatus... The conferring of an honorary doctorate or doctor honoris causa still follows, sometimes, an old protocol (formerly in Latin).

Nowadays the attribution of an honorary title such as doctor honoris causa can mean :

- recognizing and distinguishing an outstanding person who contributed notably to his or her field of expertise, higher education or a specific institution
- simultaneously honoring the recipient and the institution
- rewarding or encouraging past or future donations

Most regulations insist on the moral qualities of the honorary doctorate recipient, like probity. Another significant criterion for the nomination of a doctor honoris causa is the recognition by his peers. Doctors honoris causa can be seen in all the fields of knowledge, such as arts and letters, exact sciences, social or human sciences, philosophy etc.

Honorary distinctions can be of varied levels, the most appreciated one being, of course, that of honorary doctor (doctor honoris causa), although the one of outstanding professor (professor emeritus) is not looked down upon by teachers whose own university would not dare to grant them an honorary doctorate, at least as long as they are active.

In agreement with the rules of the Université Multiculturelle Internationale, an honorary master's degree (magister honoris causa) or an honorary doctorate (doctor honoris causa) are granted according to two essential criteria :

- the personal merit of the nominee
- the recognition by his peers

Use of title associated with honorary doctorates

By convention, recipients of honorary doctorates do not use the title "Dr" in general correspondence, although in formal correspondence from the university issuing the honorary degree it is normal to address the recipient by the title. However, this social convention is not always scrupulously observed. Notable people who have used the honorary prefix include:

- **Benjamin Franklin**, who received an honorary master's degree from [The College of William and Mary](#) in 1756, and doctorates from the [University of St. Andrews](#) in 1759 and the [University of Oxford](#) in 1762 for his scientific accomplishments. He thereafter referred to himself as "Doctor Franklin".
- **Billy Graham** had been addressed as "Dr. Graham", though his highest earned degree was a BA in anthropology from [Wheaton College](#).
- **Stephen Colbert**, who received an honorary doctorate in fine arts from [Knox College](#) in 2006, frequently made light of the concept of an "honorary doctor" by offering up scurrilous medical advice in a bit called "Cheating Death" on his television program [The Colbert Report](#) after being awarded a D.F.A.
- Memoirist and poet **Maya Angelou** had no earned degrees, but she received dozens of honorary ones and she preferred to be called "Dr. Angelou" by people other than family and close friends.
- **Myles Munroe** served as an adjunct professor of the Graduate School of Theology at Oral Roberts University, was named the University's Alumnus of the year in 2004 and received an honorary doctorate from them.
- **Richard Stallman**, the founder of the [Free Software Foundation](#) in the field of [Information Technology](#), has been awarded fourteen honorary doctorates from various international educational institutions from 1996 through 2014 including the North American [Lakehead University](#) in 2009, and now refers to himself as "Dr. Richard Stallman" in speeches, talks, videos, and email.
- **Sukarno**, the first President of Indonesia, was awarded twenty-six honorary doctorates from various international universities including [Columbia University](#), the [University of Michigan](#), the [University of Berlin](#), the [Al-Azhar University](#), the [University of Belgrade](#), the [Lomonosov University](#) and many more. And also from domestic universities including the [Universitas Gadjah Mada](#), the [Universitas Indonesia](#), the [Bandung Institute of Technology](#), and the [Universitas Padjadjaran](#). He had often been referred to by the [Indonesian Government](#) at the time as 'Dr. Ir. Sukarno', combined with his degree in architecture ([Ir.](#)) from [Bandung Institute of Technology](#).

- Author and lexicographer **Samuel Johnson**, who had some years earlier been unable (due to financial considerations) to complete his undergraduate studies at [Pembroke College, Oxford](#), was awarded the degree of Master of Arts by diploma in 1755, in recognition of his scholarly achievements. In 1765, [Trinity College, Dublin](#) awarded him the degree of [Doctor of Laws](#) and in 1775 Oxford bestowed upon him the degree of [Doctor of Civil Law](#) by diploma.
- Former Peruvian president and politician **Alan García**, who for many years held the title of Dr. in official presentations as head of state and as a civilian throughout his academic career. Heavily criticized by the media when discovering his last degree to be a Master's in economic development and not completing his doctoral studies in law, he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the [University of Delhi](#) in 1987, while making an official visit to India in his first term as president.